T/SOR/4911/8

Direct Action

No.5 winter 1998 £1.50

Welcome to

Greenworld

Carculture

Crimetime & after

Greener than cabbages?

Anarchism, Direct Action and Utopia

plus Albania, Indonesia, Granarchy, and Dover

editorial

Direct Action
is published by
Solidarity Federation,
the British section of the
International
Workers Association
(see inside back cover).

Edited, typeset and
printed labour-free by the
Direct Action Collective.

Printed at Monteney
Community Workshop,
Sheffield.

Supporters Annual
Subscription:
£12 Britain and Europe;
£15 rest of the world;
all cheques to Direct
Action.

Direct Action
PO Box 1095
Sheffield
S2 4YR
England

Enquiryline;
0161 232 7889

International
+44 161 232 7889

Internet;
http://
www.gn.apc.org/SolFed

Environment is an overused buzzword. It means everything around us. It comes into the same category as 'freedom' or 'love'. In gathering ever wider application, it has become less and less meaningful. Add to this the 'greenwash' culture that we now find ourselves in, and it is not surprising that every magazine, every consumer good, every well-meaning person and every arm of the state has had or now has a green theme, image, program, or agenda.

All in all, if it can be done in column inches, surely it has been done, as far as green issues are concerned. On the face of it, a trip through a western society seen through green tinted shades - an 'environmentalrights' themed issue of DA - seems a pretty bad idea.

And how far have we got? The late 1980's and 1990's have seen masses of direct actions undertaken in the name of protecting the environment. Some have been 'successful' in terms of achieving immediate objectives – bringing attention to the world or actually stopping developments which do or will cause unwanted damage.

But what is the result? Capitalism is more on the rampage than ever. Many green campaigners, in seeking to have the most immediate effect, have fallen into old liberal traps of playing the game with government and corporations. Incorporation and impotence is the result. Welcome to Greenworld. There are no prizes for guessing who has profited most from greenwash culture. Buy more green.

On the other hand, the knowledge and practice of new forms of direct action and the raising levels of awareness cannot be cast aside. The anarchist and radical left movements failed to win short term gains or get the amount of support that there is for anti-roads and animal rights protests. And the most positive thing to come out of this effort is the recognition amongst a small but growing number of these, that replacing capitalism is the only answer, and that this will not be achieved by protest alone.

Overcoming exploitation and oppression is not a part-time hobby, nor is it up for negotiation with the exploiters and oppressors. It requires effort on several fronts. Personal change, political awareness of the underlying causes of our predicament, and concerted organisation to build real alternatives – not forgetting the crucial direct action to defend our quality of life.

Joint actions such as Liverpool Dockers and Reclaim the Streets are examples of people taking risks with their ideas and organisations for mutual benefit. This will hopefully continue to lead to a far better understanding of apparently different radical agendas. Apparent differences will disappear. The reason for our predicament will be recognised as the same – a few opportunists with monopolistic and hierarchical tendencies using and abusing us and the planet.

The goals we all share will be common: A decent quality of life without oppression and abuse – a new way of living and a system of values which more accurately reflects our desires. The way of achieving these goals will be clear: Building the future now. Defending our gains. Going on the offensive against those intent on filling their pockets at our expense. This may sound like a tall order in a paragraph. But it's far more fun in practice. More risky, more necessary and more rewarding than what you were doing just before you picked this magazine up.

Get in touch

Readers' views are welcome. Whether opinions, additional information or letters responding to articles or raising issues of interest, we want to hear from you. If you have questions for the DA Collective, or would like to know more about us or the Solidarity Federation, drop us a line. Do not expect high pressure sales, paper-selling requests or demands for this or that, do expect a reasonably prompt reply.

Notes for Contributors

If you would like to contribute more than brief opinions, we request you send articles (between 500 and 1500 words if possible) in hardcopy and on disk in either Word for Windows PC version not greater than 7 or ASCII format. Contact us for electronic mail addresses or alternative formats. While unsolicited articles are welcome, they can only be returned if a SAE is enclosed.

DA Regional Distributors:

London and South: DA-SF, PO Box 1681, London, N8 7DN
Midlands: DA-SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW
E Anglia: DA-SF, 13 Muspole Workshops, Muspole St, Norwich, NR3 1DJ
NE: DA-SF, PO Box 1095, Sheffield, S2 4YR
NW: DA-SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW
Scotland: SF c/o Fahrenheit 451, Virginia Galleries, Virginia St, Glasgow
Wales: DA-SF, PO Box 696, Cardiff, CF1 9US

Bulk Orders:
AK PO Box 12766
Edinburgh
EH8 9YE Scotland.
phone 0131 555 5165
ak@akedin.demon.co.uk

contents

regulars

10 direct actions
Dover, the Magnet Interview, and more

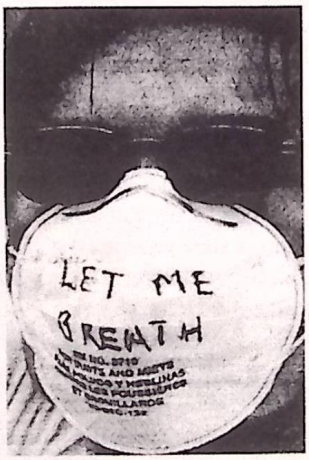
14 news and comment
New labour same fag breaks, global warnings, and rail goes offtrack

15 international news
Bitesize coverage from across the planet
Global Focus: South Africa

23 the faqs
Facts on veganism

24 letters and stories
3 little pigs

31 closer look: Albanian spring
Upon the relics of pseudosocialist regimes, no flower has bloomed.. but Albania has had its unpredictable moments



34 endpiece: Holidaysmog
Visiting old friends with new problems

environmentalrights

4 Are we as green as we are cabbage looking?
On big ideas, shades of green, and anarcho-syndicalism

5 Building for people
How builders saved Kelly's Bush

6 Carculture
Sourcing carculture - and making the big break

8 Anarchism, direct action & utopia
As Oscar Wilde put it, "Progress is the realisation of Utopia"

9 Granarchy!
Move over Swampy, grandad's greying guerrillas are digging in for the winter

18 Crimetime and after
Bighting the bullet: exposing the bankruptcy of traditional right, left and anarchist approaches to crime

21 Cashcropping
Unlabelled genetically modified food is big business

22 Food for thought
Towards a shoppers' strike, plus a trip to planet vegan

reviews 26-30

environmentalrights

Do-Thinking - Timber Wars, SchNEWS, Road Raging, Battle for the Trees, Deep Ecology and Anarchism, Anarchism and Environmental Survival

Gandalf and After - Green Anarchist, Animal Liberation Front, Ecology and Anarchism

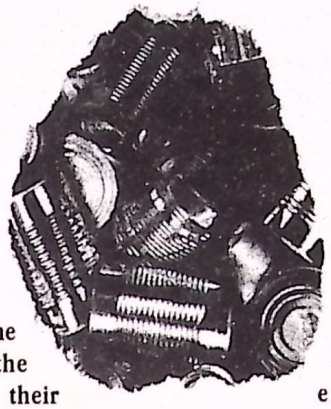
Do or Die - Earth First

books
Digital Women & Technoculture, Sadie Plant
A Glimpse of Hell, Amnesty International

music
Songs of Anarchy and Revolution, The Men, Oyster Band, Billy Bragg and friends

conference
Galton Institute on Eugenics

Are we as green as we are cabbage looking?



Green has long had multiple implications – but do all of us would-be swampies necessarily lack something in the streetwise department? And anarcho-syndicalist greens? Red and Black don't really clash with green. It's just, well... visually it's a bold fashion statement. But until this organ rightly appoints me as fashion editor, I guess I had better address issues more political than colour matching [sigh!].

As I will keep pointing out, anarcho-syndicalism is about creating a better, freer world starting here and now and using means compatible with its aims. If we want to create a better world on this planet, it seems only sensible that we should have a healthy interest in keeping it alive. Whilst green concerns are therefore implicit within anarcho-syndicalism, anarcho-syndicalism itself is neither green nor not green. I am not about to claim it has in the last decade transformed itself into the new improved eco-anarcho-syndicalism (eco-assm?). I can't say that anarcho-syndicalism is 'greener' than a decade ago. What I can say is that I came to politics, partially, through the environmental movement, and that what has changed is the scale, size and direction of the green movement and not the position of anarcho-syndicalism in relation to it.

The green movement has broadened and diversified markedly in two respects. It has grown at the shallow end quite substantially. The 'respectable' paddling pool end of the movement used to content itself to criticising the poor of the third world for chopping down the rain forest. These were the people who made sure all their Christmas cards were recycled whilst still taking the kids to school, commuting to work and the out-of-town supermarket in a two-litre car. These people have gone head over heals for 'green investment'. This includes buying into pensions and saving schemes that avoid the worst polluters and thereby allegedly turning capitalism green. The whole basis of this assumption is that capitalism can solve the world's problems if you just play with it a bit. Now we live in a capitalist system and I, for one, am not wildly optimistic about there being a state pension or a social revolution before I retire. I have no objection to those who have the option choosing a pension which seeks not to invest in the worst examples of environmentally degrading industry, but please do not pretend that this is the answer. Neither should we place our trust in the idea of the green consumer. By all means go 'green', buy environmentally less damaging products, go for fair trade, organically grown and not tested on animals; but don't pretend it's going to save the world.

by all means go 'green'.. but don't pretend it's going to save the world

Capitalism is about ever increasing growth, about profits in the form of ever bigger dividends for shareholders and bosses. The environment cannot support increasing levels of capitalist growth. This leaves two options for environmentalists who put their faith in capitalism. The first is that something else other than profit gives. So say bye bye to workers rights, decent wages and conditions and bye bye to any form of widening access to even the basic requirements of life. The second is that capitalism as such starts to grind to a halt and the dividends stop coming. What happens then? Either the environmental destruction resumes with even greater ferocity, or the free market is abandoned in favour of a more rigorously authoritarian form of government.

Moving on down towards the deep end, things are a bit more interesting and a bit more relevant. Direct action is becoming the method of choice, and not just for road and runway protestors. There is a lot to be positive about, with committed people getting out and doing things. Green activists are practising methods of direct action and developing new ones, which we can all adopt and adapt. The only real problem here is the danger of over-romanticising people or small groups, their actions and what they stand for.

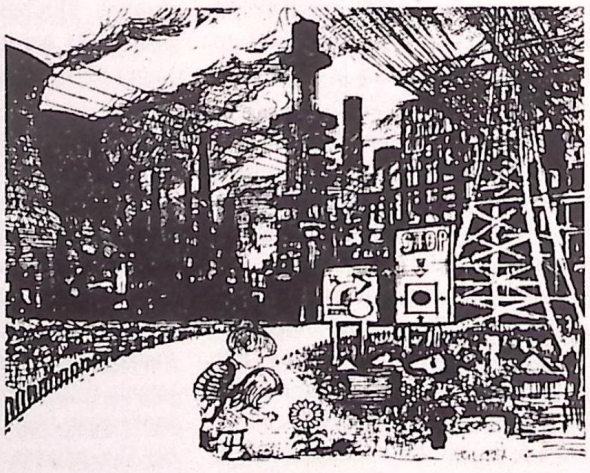
A commitment to direct action, working towards specific and worthwhile aims is good, but let's not be too carried away. The environment needs people to stand up and defend it, and anarcho-syndicalists need to continue taking an active role, and supporting others that do. But we should also retain our critical faculties. Whilst it is essential that we have a living functioning planet in which to build a better society, it is possible to defend the environment and to defend the wider ideas of a democratic accountable structured organisation. We seek not to just save the planet from the excesses of capitalism, but to replace capitalism with a better, fairer system. As such, we need to involve all that is positive about current green activism, all that is forward looking, that seeks to act accountably and democratically, all that is aware of the wider political context. Those who promote ongoing democratic revolutionary organisations, which

combine political-economic strategy with activism, are mirroring what we know as anarcho-syndicalism. In short, we are of the same persuasion.

And this doesn't mean 'we want them all to become anarcho-syndicalists'. Anarcho-syndicalism is not a set of commandments in tablets of stone – it is basic principles with phenomenally wide application. New ideas from the green movement in application of anarcho-syndicalism are welcome – we can all learn and share together, one might say. One cannot change society just by opposing the worst aspects of capitalism, vital though that is. It is important to look not just at economic/workplace or pure environmental issues, but at both – and at social issues too. For example, the question of transportation needs to be addressed through looking at why people and goods need to travel so often and so far. This means addressing the issue in terms other than just the mode of transportation used.

We strive to organise a society that actively seeks to involve all in its decision making. We should strive to ensure that our actions and politics are open to all. That doesn't mean bowing to mere popularism, it means looking for and building a consensus. The label of eco-fascism is often used by anarchists against authoritarian greens who, either through intent or lack of experience, fail to see the libertarian possibilities of green politics and seek to save the world by enforcement. Whilst the label is over-used, there is a tendency for some of those immersed in green politics to reach for the coercive measure when they see the chance, and this needs to be watched for and challenged. An ecologically sound big brother is still a big brother, just as produce from organic slave labour (real or economic) is still the produce of slave labour.

an ecologically sound big brother is still a big brother



Anarcho-syndicalism is neither green nor not green. It is not deep green nor light green, not green with a big 'g' or green with a little 'g'. It just is. So there. Use it.

Building for people

In 1972, a group of residents of Hunters Hill, a middle class suburb of Sydney, approached the Builders Labourers Federation about the fate of Kelly's Bush, an area of natural bushland on the Parramatta River. Plans were afoot to build homes on it, despite the opposition of local people, who used every form of traditional protest. The union told the developer that if it persisted, it would face a ban on all its Sydney projects. The threat worked, and Kelly's Bush is still there.

The BLF in New South Wales, though not a syndicalist union, operated according to principles of rank and file control and direct action that are very familiar to us. They were unique among Australian unions in limiting the tenure of their officials for example.

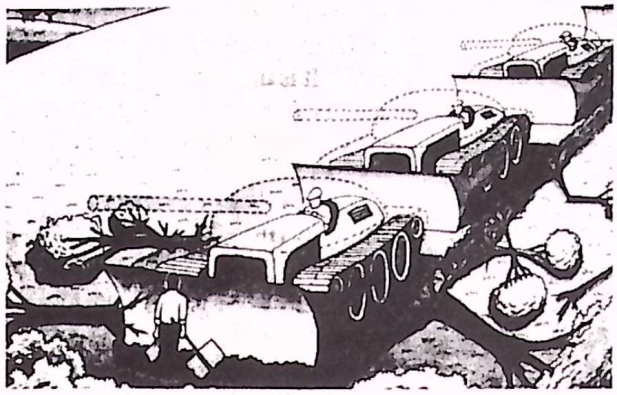
Next, the union put a ban on building on parkland in the Eastlakes area of the city. One of the unionists coined the term "Green Bans" because of their environmental impact.

This was followed by a ban on development in the Rocks, the earliest settled area of Sydney and, at the time, a poor working class area. The City Council and developers wanted to evict all the poor, knock down most of the historic buildings and put skyscrapers in their place. The few historic buildings to be left were to be reserved for the rich. Many tenants had already left when those remaining rebelled and asked the BLF for help. The BLF put a ban on any demolition. The developers pushed ahead despite the ban, and angry residents confronted bulldozers. As a result, the union representing the bulldozer operators joined in the ban. During the stalemate that followed, the union helped residents and other interested parties draw up the Rocks People's Plan.

The union was now called on to help in all sorts of other campaigns, in every case at the request of the people involved. One Green Ban was to save the Botanic Gardens, threatened by an underground car park for the new Opera House. The BLF insisted that three giant Moreton Bay Fig trees must be protected as part of the scheme. Unable to comply, the government gave in and they are still there. By May 1973, projects worth A$2500 million had been halted by Green Bans.

The Red & Black Club - Solidarity Federation will be showing a video, "Shaking the Foundations" about the BLF in the new year, and will be writing more about this remarkable fighting union.
Contact them c/o Black Flag, BM Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX (0171-358 1854).

Carculture



A discussion of environmental issues would be incomplete without addressing the subject of transport. Pollution and health, energy and resources, the destruction of natural habitats are a few obvious areas where transport has an impact. An anarcho-syndicalist approach to transport has some crucial questions to answer. How would an anarchist society organise its transport infrastructure? What can be done in the here and now to bring about a sensible transport system? What roles should public and private transport play? Should we actively oppose attacks on public transport? How can we challenge and change the dominant culture of car dependence? Future *DA*'s will deal with these issues but here I intend to deal with the culture of the car.

Take a few minutes to think about the car and all sorts of images quickly come to mind. There's the imagery of death - the fatal accident or slow poisoning by exhaust fumes. There's the frustration and anger of the traffic jam. There's the road rage attack - people getting more and more wound up behind the wheel of a killing machine. There's the colourful TV pictures of anti-roads protesters in their tunnels and tree houses. There's the conspicuous flaunting of power and wealth of the sleek, black limousine. There's the machismo of the sports car, the Grand Prix circuit and the ads with the seductive beauty fingering the gear stick - buy this car and get laid! There's the dodgy dealer, car-theft, joy-riding... Whatever the images, they leave little doubt that the car occupies an important position in our society and our culture.

The obvious environmental impacts of the car are in pollution, misuse and waste of natural resources and destruction of the natural environment. Pollution comes in many guises. It comes directly from the belching of tonnes upon tonnes of gases and particles from millions upon millions of exhaust pipes, from CFC's released by car air conditioners, from the burning of plastics from scrapped cars, from the dumping of car batteries and so on and so on. It comes indirectly from spillages of crude oil, much of which is destined to be petrol and diesel, from asphalt used in road-building, waste from tyre and plastic manufacturing and so on and so on. All of this adds up to a huge amount of the pollution now plaguing the planet's atmosphere, land and water, and contributes significantly to global warming, ozone depletion and a host of respiratory diseases.

..the seductive beauty fingering the gear stick - buy this car and get laid!

It's not just a simple case of a vast amount of the world's energy and natural resources being swallowed up by car production, car fuel, and the whole range of other industries that service the car. What compounds the whole problem is something which borders on the criminal - built-in obsolescence. It would surely be sensible to produce cars that last for years, but the capitalist drive to maximise profits dictates otherwise. The net effect is yet more car production, more energy consumption, more wasted resources and, of course, more pollution and contamination of our living space. Furthermore, the cars of today are still overwhelmingly inefficient fuel users, for the most part using under a fifth of the potential energy available to them.

Then there is the destruction wreaked by the construction of new roads and motorways. A typical 6-lane motorway carries about 120,000 passengers a day and buries 25 acres of land beneath every mile. Compare this with a 2-track railway which can carry 200,000 passengers a day on less than 17% of the area. Since the 1960's, British governments have blindly followed the dictats of the road and car lobbies, lashing money around for all manner of new motorways, by-passes, relief roads and so on. The justification, of course, has been that an ever-increasing volume of traffic requires more and more roads. Yet, even in the earliest days of increased road building, there were warnings that more roads would lead to more traffic, leading to yet more new roads, and on, and on in a crazy spiral. They create more traffic because employers relocate to cheaper sites causing more workers to travel further to their work; because shops relocate to out-of-town shopping centres causing more shoppers to use their cars rather than public transport; because car culture demands that daily life be increasingly packaged and fitted around the car. Finally, in the last few years, when it has so obviously proved to be true, this advice has begun to get through. This has led to some planned new roads being scrapped, though many still remain on the planning tables.

Despite this, politicians offer little or no vision of a way forward. This is a situation which suits the car corporations, oil companies, road building contractors and all the other vested interests, the banks and insurance companies included. All of these would have much to lose and little to gain if transport policy were ever to move away from its current emphasis on the private motor car and its supporting road network.

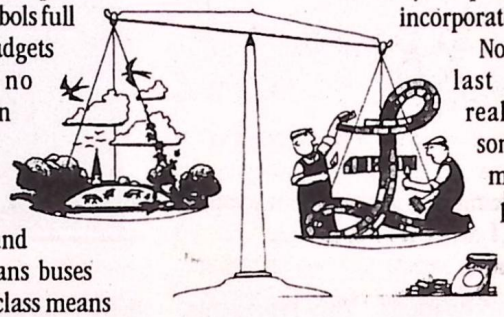
sourcing carculture

This emphasis dates back to the 1950's and 60's, capitalism's golden age. All sorts of consumer goods, previously owned only by the wealthy, were now being mass-produced and were within the means of the mass of the population. The car was part and

parcel of this expansion. Almost simultaneously, the rail network underwent a massive programme of closures and has suffered ever since from chronic under-investment. Even with the end of the golden age with the crises of the 1970's, this car culture has continued unabated.

hollow freedom

Car culture means 33% of space in our cities dedicated to the car - roads, garages, parking, showrooms, petrol stations, insurance companies, advertising. It means rip-off prices for souped-up status symbols full of knick-knacks and gadgets often with little or no practical value other than to jack up the cost. It means massive debt for ordinary people while car companies roll around in mega-profits. It means buses and trains are a second class means of travel, unavailable in large parts of the country. It means all the catalogue of death, destruction and pollution above.



So, does the car have any saving graces at all? Its advocates would argue that it has liberated vast numbers of car owners to travel where and when they like. While this idea contains some truth, a closer analysis of the car's costs and benefits has already shown how it infringes on all our freedom. After all, what freedom is there in wanton pollution and destruction of the planet? What freedom is there for the millions suffering from severe respiratory disorders? Or for the millions who have lost their lives to the car? Furthermore, this supposed freedom granted to car owners seems to be applied across the board to all journeys. Many journeys, such as those to work, to school, to city centres, to other major towns and cities are possible by public transport. But public transport is unreliable, the argument goes. This, however, is only true because the present system is so badly funded and so badly organised. A much more sensible system, a real alternative to the bumper to bumper madness of current policy, could easily be brought about. All it requires is the necessary political will - and therein lies the problem.

There is yet another argument that car owners turn to: "Why pay for a train or bus journey when I've already spent £X thousand on my car. It doesn't make economic sense." This can only be countered by challenging the whole idea of car ownership. Why not have a system whereby, if a car journey is necessary, a taxi or a car from a community- or state-owned pool is used? It is hard - but not impossible - to imagine this under capitalism. However, a collective- or community-orientated society such as that envisaged by anarcho-syndicalists, as opposed to the individualism promoted by capitalism, would certainly incorporate such ideas.

What freedom is there for the millions suffering from severe respiratory disorders?

Now that governments seem at last to be waking up to the realities of global warming, some improvements have been made and others are in the pipeline. We have seen the introduction of lead-free petrol and catalytic converters. More efficient engines are already possible. Their introduction has been resisted until now because there's not enough profit in them for the oil companies. Further down the line are alternative and cleaner fuels like electric cars using rechargeable batteries, and cars powered by hydrogen.

There are also legislative measures under consideration. These are primarily based on making it more expensive to travel by car such as more tolls and remote charging. Some governments around the world have already taken a range of measures. An example is the crisis management last summer in Paris during heavy smog, when vehicle numbers were highly restricted. In Singapore, there is a massive central database containing the whole population's travel needs and an extensive public transport system to cater for those needs. To own a car in Singapore requires a permit which is so expensive, and there are so few of them, that many well-off people have no option but to use public transport.

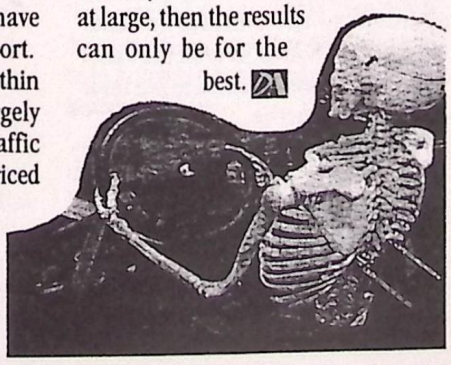
It is entirely conceivable that within a few decades there could be largely non-polluting cars and lower traffic levels, charges and tolls having priced many people off the roads. We would argue that this would be no great fundamental change. Yes, the atmosphere would benefit, and breathing disorders would be greatly reduced. But we would still be a society enslaved to the car, albeit a clean car.

To organise an ideal transport system will mean breaking the stranglehold that car culture has on society. This is unlikely to happen under capitalism, where cars equal profits for giant multinational corporations, whereas public transport, or a more community- or people-orientated system, equals little or no profit. We are not saying that the car should disappear but that it should have its place within a sensibly planned policy which covers all forms of transport.

making the big break

A revolutionary society capable of re-organising the nature of work, dispensing with masses of unnecessary journeys to alienating jobs, looks some way off. In the meantime, anarcho-syndicalists can support any changes which lessen the impact of the car on the environment, while pointing out the contradictions within capitalism that work against such measures. To us, the concept of environment means more than simply the atmosphere, the land, the sea, the rivers, and so forth. It also means the space we live in and the way that society impacts on our daily lives. It means stress and other health effects from long journeys in heavy traffic. It means the constant danger to our children from cars in the streets where they play or where they walk home from school.

As with all technology, the effects depend on who is in control of it. If it's controlled by power-hungry profit-thirsty capitalist corporations, then it's no surprise to find the use of technology has mainly harmful effects. On the other hand, if the technology that is used to enhance people's lives is under their direct control, and planned entirely for the benefit of society at large, then the results can only be for the best.



Anarchism, Direct Action & Utopia

"The essential element in utopia is not hope, but desire"
Ruth Levitas

A central tenet of anarchism is that ends and means are inseparable. In seeking social change, anarchists have always been adamant that a non-authoritarian society can emerge only through non-authoritarian practice, rejecting the intermediate State structures and temporary dictatorships that have disfigured Marxist socialism. Rather, a distinctive characteristic of anarchist programs is that they involve immediate movement towards voluntarism and anti-authoritarianism.

These programs reject party representations - with its inevitable concessions, endemic corruption, and debilitating remoteness, in favour of direct action, aimed at actively seeking to take control of circumstance. In reality, since the anarchist ideal is a society that is both voluntaristic and non-authoritarian, this direct action is an attempt to create this ideal - the anarchist utopia - in the present. Anarchists are not content to wait until 'after the revolution' or until the ballot papers have been counted to put their idea(l)s into practice.

At a basic level, direct action is any attempt to attain a goal without recourse to petitioning those in authority, or seeking an outcome indirectly - hence it does not include voting or demonstrations, but does encompass anti-road protests, strikes, and occupations. This represents, though, only a very limited view of direct action, a form that is driven by immediate ends. In many cases, direct action is seen as merely a tactic, the most likely strategy to succeed under particular circumstances, and a more fundamental aspect - the liberatory potential of acting without mediation - is forgotten.

direct action should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook

Direct action is not an unstructured dynamism or a call to action at all costs; it is a rejection of the structures of control and a determination to autonomy in all aspects of social existence - a struggle for utopia. In short, direct action is not a 'tactic' that can be adopted or discarded in terms of its 'effectiveness' or popularity'; it is a moral principle, an ideal, indeed, a sensibility. It should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook.

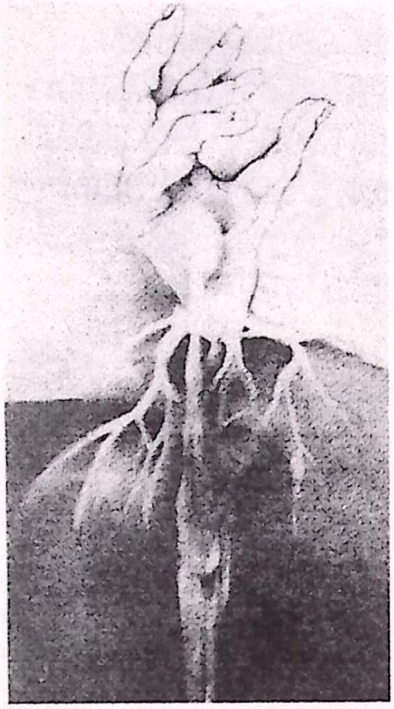
Direct action becomes therefore the underlying principle of anarchism, and the necessity of maintaining the utopian vision as an essential element of anarchism becomes clear. It is only through the attempt to achieve utopia that direct action moves beyond a narrow dynamism to become the nucleus of libertarian practice.

It is true that utopianism is often denigrated, seen as either a motivation toward unrealistic goals or as the insistence on applying a rigid blueprint of a perfect society. While there is an element of truth in these criticisms they are neither necessary nor inevitable. Instead, utopianism can offer a different truth.

Realism too often becomes an acceptance of the status quo - what is real is what is offered to us now, a pitiful substitute for a genuine humanity and realistic ecology. Hence anarchists have sought to "Demand the Impossible!", to move beyond the contours of drab convention and stifling routine. It may not even be that such utopias offer an immediately attainable reality - their function is to offer a playground for our desires, to allow us to move beyond the narrow confines of the present and ponder the infinite possibilities of the future. If we do not allow our imaginations free play, we risk becoming trapped forever in a hierarchical, repressive and repressed society.

Neither is it true that utopia demands a rigid blueprint to be adhered to - instead it offers suggestions, possibilities that may or may not be reached. And if they are reached, they become staging points for the journey to the next utopia; as Oscar Wilde put it, *"Progress is the realisation of Utopia"*.

It is worth remembering, though, that utopia is not only the concern of the radical imagination - the 'futurologists' (in reality apologists for the present), routinely offer new



visions of a capitalist future, where the super-consumer will be able to shop in ever greater comfort in the sanitised and surveilled mega-markets of the twenty-first century. If there is a lesson in this, it is that we cannot allow our utopias to be constructed on the basis of consumerism and complex technologies, under the relentless gaze of the corporations and bureaucracies.

If anarchism becomes focused on action alone, it loses one of its most precious insights - the possibility not only of a better world, but also of our ability to create it. Without this vision, anarchism and direct action become hollow shells, always manoeuvring on terrain created by power. Both theory and practice become bogged down in a morass of half-measures and uncritical acceptance of the categories of oppression. No one can see anything different, or really believes that achieving it is possible. Utopia does not create itself, and vision alone does not change the world. That is the purpose of direct action. But without the vision, the action can be meaningless outside its immediate context, and little victories can easily become ends in themselves, rather than the first, small, tentative steps to a radically different reality. We must never forget how to dream.

(sourced from Yorkshire Anarchist - thanks to Peri)

Granarchy!

Move over Swampy, grandad's greying guerrillas are digging in for the winter

As people grow older, they feel colder. The 50 or so pensioners huddled in Leicester Town Hall had come prepared. It was October but felt like January, and a good few put on their scarves. However, their language soon warmed up the chamber. A new generation of 'grey guerrillas' is on the march and their commanding officers were discussing strategy.

The Pensioners' Rights Campaign is a splinter group of the highly respectable, and constitutional, National Pensioners' Convention. The Convention, which has about 2 million members, boasts Jack Jones, the former trade union baron, as spokesman.

For years it has lobbied for a better deal for pensioners to no avail. Now the 5,000-strong rights campaign says the time for talking is over. They have taken to the streets twice this year, causing chaos. Days before the general election, a small contingent blocked Leicester's main street and held up traffic for more than an hour.

Humber Bridge was a pilot; we wanted to see if direct action works - it does

In September, seven members with a collective age of more than 500 moved with military precision into position on the Humber Bridge, the world's largest single-span construction. Within minutes, there was a two-mile tailback. Chief of Staff was Chris Frith, 74, a dapper man with neat beard, jacket, shirt and tie. 'I'm no Swampy, but I've got to the age when I am fed up of being treated like a second-class citizen. Humber Bridge was a pilot; we wanted to see if direct action works - it does.' No-one was injured, but at one stage he feared for his life. 'We explained to drivers that we were protesting at the erosion of pensions and most were sympathetic. But there was a security guard that tried to provoke violence. He was screaming at this guy in a van "run the bugger over". The van knocked me to my knees.

There was awareness that the police had dealt leniently with the protesters. 'It only takes a few of us to cause massive disruption. But we must be prepared for the police to charge us and to start smashing heads. Illegality is the only way,' one elderly woman warned her comrades, earning applause.

Like all guerrillas, the rights campaign warriors refuse to divulge their next action. Airports have been discussed and one faction is keen to close the Mersey Tunnel. Next time, there will be more than one target with operations in five or six cities timed for maximum media impact.

The pensioners' case is simple. State pensions were once linked to the national average wage, but Margaret Thatcher changed the criteria and linked them to the retail price index - reducing their value at a stroke. The single pension is just over £60 a week, £98 for couples. Mr Frith and his comrades want the link with the average wage restored. The Government has ruled this out and Ministers are investigating the possibility of compulsory private pensions as a back up to the state provision.

Peter Kendall, a member of the Humberside brigade, cannot wait for the next operation. 'The Government is doing what Maxwell did, swindling us out of our pensions. The politicians just pat us on the head and say how marvellous we are. They think we are going to kick the bucket. If they think they can award themselves massive pay increases and then tell us we have to accept what they give us, they had better watch out.'

Ron Beake, the rights campaign chairman, will visit the US soon to meet leaders of the Grey Panthers, one of the strongest lobby groups in America, which has targeted supermarkets with great success. Tesco, Sainsbury et al. .. you have been warned!"

Dover straits

On November 15th, people gathered in Dover to support the Roma asylum seekers who had been so much in the media in the days before. The SolFed's support in numbers, complete with banners, suitably impressed those who had gathered in the park. They were there to take part in the counter demo against the National Front who were due to march along Dover's esplanade, demanding the Roma people be sent back to persecution.

All this was taking place against a background of increasing hostility to the Roma refugees in the town. Two primary schools had been the centre of petitions by parents threatening to remove their children if Roma children were allowed to attend the schools. Another petition, accusing the Roma of 'raping' our benefits system, had been started by a certain Evelyne Reynolds of Gamley's toyshop (no kidding), and displayed in the butcher's next door. The butcher, a Mr Tong, appeared on the recent 'World in Action' to explain how popular his hostility was.

Meanwhile, the two Saturdays before the demo, SolFed, IWW and Kent Campaign for Asylum Seekers leafleted the centre of Dover with an info-sheet on the Roma, originally perhaps the sole response to the Labour government's media campaign of disinformation. The reaction of the locals varied from 'they all ought to be taken out in a boat and sunk', to indifference, with a few prepared to listen. A brazen 'NO SLOVAKS' sign in a shop window was removed after persuasive language was used.

It's pointless to quote all the anti-refugee bilge from the government. A letter from Doug Henderson (the then shadow spokesperson on immigration) to a member of KCAS, admitted there was persecution of Roma in the former Czechoslovakia. Since then, both the Dover MP and O'Brien, the Immigration Minister, have talked of the Roma as 'bogus asylum seekers'.

On October 22nd, O'Brien warned that these people would be treated toughly. The language of Prosser (local MP), O'Brien, the Mail, the Sun and the BNP and NF leaflets share the same vocabulary. If Roma children burn to death in refugee hostels, the Sun and Mail bear responsibility for it. Hostility to the Roma in eastern Europe has led to them being hounded and killed. People, like the above, who have encouraged prejudice, should be blamed for the results.

A catalogue of persecution of Roma is not possible here. Our leaflets itemised such incidents as the drowning of a young Roma by skinheads in Pisek, Czech Republic; the burning alive of a man in Slovakia; the family of 5 murdered in Rimarska Sobota; a young Roma shot dead in Michalovce, with a witness to the incident later beaten to death. We had first hand accounts of many incidents from relatives.

The growth of skinhead Nazi groups in these countries is paralleled in official circles: 'Gypsies might have protection under the law, but for true citizens, gypsies have none,' said Dr Sladek, leader of the Czech Republican Party, speaking of the flight of Roma to Dover. DA

background

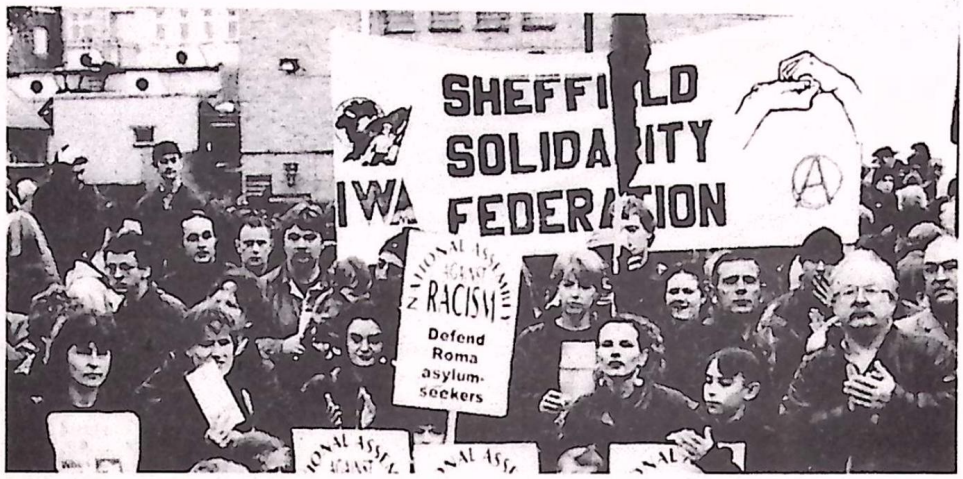
October saw Romany people arriving in Dover fleeing persecution and physical assault in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The persecution has included the chilling withdrawal of child benefit to Romany families in Slovakia.

According to President Meciar of Slovakia, this is to "curb the reproduction of socially unadaptable people". The Slovak Embassy denies the Romanies are persecuted, calling them 'economic migrants', although they admitted they stopped benefits to unemployed Romanies.

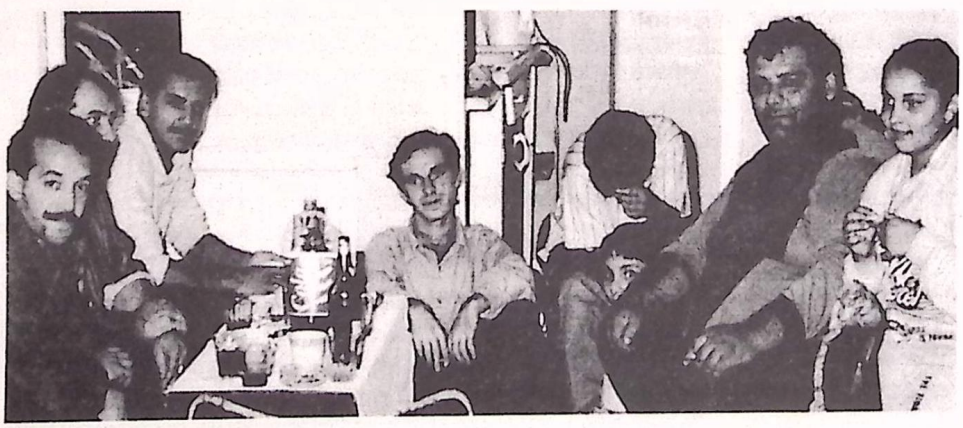
In the last 4 years, 17 Romany people have been murdered and in Slovakia a man was covered in petrol and burned alive. Believing that they would find a land free of racism and persecution, many Romany families came to Britain via Germany, France and Belgium to seek political asylum from horrific racism.

In opposition, the Labour Home Affairs team quoted "evidence of the persecution of groups like the Romanies" but in Government Labour does little and threatens asylum seekers with deportation.

The part of SolFed and KCAS in the original Czech documentaries attributed with starting the escape of Romanies to Dover has to be seen for what it was. As Josef Klima, the TV Nova journalist behind the programmes put it, "People think that it was us who made the Romanies want to leave. But we didn't do it. We just mapped out the situation and presented it to our viewers."



15th November 1997
In just a few days, more than 50 organisations involved in the anti-facist movement mobilised hundreds of people and sent the facists packing. Anti-facists half a mile away from the NF march were videoed and threatened with arrest unless they submitted to a comprehensive body search and gave their name, address and personal details. 6 anti-fascists were arrested (2 not charged, 4 released on bail).



roots of discrimination

A census in 1992 recorded 400,000 Romanies in the Czech Republic, but the real number is probably at least two million. Across the region there may be some eight million or more. Equally no-one denies that Romanies frequently suffer harassment and persecution.

The background to the current migration from the Czech Republic and Slovakia is not a mystery. There is clear historical evidence of discrimination and disadvantage at home. The break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993 and the move to a market economy has made matters worse. Czech Romanies were declared stateless and deported across the border. Slovakia's Premier Vladimir Meciar warned that "if we do not deal with them now, then they will deal with us in time". A recent survey of Romany life across central Europe records police violence and skinhead attacks - as well as the difficulties faced by Romanies seeking to redefine their identity in a hostile and changing world.

The roots of discrimination need to be traced back to their source. The question should be put directly to President Vaclav Havel: why are the Czech Romanies leaving?

education education & education

Following the government's hasty rejection and rejig of the Dearing Report, which was a major investigation into the organisation of Higher Education in the UK, students in higher education will now have to pay £1,000 per year towards their tuition fees. Combined with the withering away of maintenance grants this will further increase student debts and heighten the barrier to those entering from poorer back grounds. Even the vice-chancellors have recognised this.

Ignoring that this information came out amongst a blur of u-turns, misinformation, complete cock-ups and general piss-taking, there has so far been little evidence of opposition to fees on a coordinated level. So it was good to see the start of some basic opposition on November 1st.

A good turn-out and a march through the busy shopping centre of Manchester (one of a number events in various cities that day). The only thing missing was the breadth of participation; it's not reasonable to rely on current students (who won't have to pay) to be the sole mass opposition.

The teaching and support staff unions need to join in, not just make written submissions to the government saying they don't like it. There were three small banners on the march from unions (GMB, NATFHE and Unison), none of which came with a particularly big group.

The unions need to make it clear to their members that not only will students suffer but, as numbers of students drop, so will the number of staff. Higher education is already strapped for cash, the current projected 6% drop in enrollments for 1998/99 will have disastrous effects on budgets.

Another group that needs to be drawn in are the students currently in further education, in colleges and in sixth forms. It is these students and their families who will have to pay the fees. What we have here is the opportunity to make and build links across education. What is needed to involve school students, FE College students, HE students, unions in schools, colleges and universities as well as families which may be forced to make a choice of trying to support a student though HE?

Obviously given that fees are now definitely going to happen, opposition to them needs to be designed around getting rid of them.

New Labour have learnt one thing off the Tories that they didn't copy outright; they don't delay, it's just straight in there - a few leaks, some confusing spin and the next thing it's in your lap chewing your cardigan.

The Magnet Interview

The Magnet Strikers have been locked out for over a year. We have been following the dispute in previous issues of DA, SolFed groups have been picketing Magnet outlets, raising money through benefits, and giving donations to help keep the strikers and their families going. But this is not enough – they need your help too – as they told DA in this recent interview.

I understand that the dispute began after management introduced an immediate pay cut plus a three year freeze on future pay rises. Your response: the 350 of you working at the Darlington factory, where MAGNET kitchens are built, was to reject this attack on your pay and vote for industrial action - to strike. You were then all immediately sacked. Was the decision to strike an easy one and what other options were considered, for example occupying the plant?
This was not an easy decision, due to the stress in the workplace since Berisford bought out Magnet in 1993, along with the de-skilling of the workforce (most being long-serving with up to 42 years service), and the conditions being taken away. Other options were tried and ACAS brought in.

What has the response and support been from other MAGNET workers?
Very poor. We have lorries crossing official picket lines – drivers are in the 4 unions involved in the dispute (TGWU, UCATT, AEEU and GMB).

There are a number of unions with members amongst you, what support has there been? Do you feel, as many of the Liverpool dockers do, that you have been in effect abandoned by the officials that run the trade union movement?
For months the feeling was of being on our own. Grass roots members tried to help but there seemed to be no response from higher up. Twice we have been in a desperate situation regarding funding. We are now.

Beyond this what support have you had from trade unionists on the ground, and from other organisations?
Grass roots have been OK, but nothing really organised into ongoing financial or physical support on a regular basis.

Considering the countless left groups that exist, have they been of any concrete use?
SWP helped with bucket collections and delegation work, but this has trailed off a lot.

Are MAGNET workers at showrooms and any distribution centres unionised?
Existing Magnet staff are not unionised.

The Berisford group, the parent company of MAGNET, has subsidiaries in many European companies, the United States and elsewhere. Has any progress been possible in initiating solidarity action in any of these areas? What steps have you taken?
Not as yet. We have issued lists of Welbilt, Berisford's other subsidiary, to contacts in this country, who said they would pass them on to European contacts

A number of Solidarity Federation branches in Britain are and have been supporting you by picketing MAGNET showrooms and urging customers to boycott MAGNET. This has now cost MAGNET several tens of thousands of pounds in lost trade. As you might be aware, the Solidarity Federation is part of the International Workers' Association, which has sections that are revolutionary unions in a number of the countries where subsidiaries of Berisford trade. What action would you like these IWA member unions to take in order to increase pressure and support your struggle?
To step up the leafleting campaign and inform everybody they possibly can. This is vital. This has been the most time-consuming – trying to get national and international press to inform others of our dispute. We want to appeal to everyone.

What initiatives are you undertaking or hoping for in this area?
To get their contacts to help us financially and physically, to leaflet and boycott all Magnet products, such as the Penrith door company in Penrith and Allerton Glass in Wales. We know we can win if enough pressure can be applied on a regular basis, not just occasionally.

Yourselves, the Liverpool dockers and virtually every other determined and organised group of workers in dispute have been fighting in an environment where active support from union leaders and fellow workers in the same unions

has been largely non-existent. Do you think we give too little attention to educating ourselves and others on the need for solidarity and strong workplace organisation until it's too late?
Yes, most certainly. But there again, nobody thinks it will actually happen to them until it is too late.

It is often stated that industrial action is an education and changes a person's perspective on society and life. Would you agree?
Yes. This is when you see the injustices stacked against you.

The 1980's and '90's have seen many notable disputes that have symbolised the increasing aggression of management and capitalism. From the Miners' strike and Wapping and countless others, there have been moments of determination and solidarity that many will never forget, but nonetheless they have been "heroic defeats". The odds are always stacked against us, with the trade union movement in the hands of people whose only concern is their funds and respectability - what way do you see for working people to build a movement that can fight and deliver solidarity, in short, win on its own terms?
I believe that ordinary people like myself and my family can make a difference, and need to keep informing those in authority what grass roots feelings are. Go to the top, write and phone until they take notice. They were elected and formed to fight injustice.

Have the trade union officials you meet any real understanding and commitment to your struggle? Or do you feel that, as large institutions all too often far-removed from the workplace, they have lost their way?
Most of them have, actually, but I have met a few recently whom I have talked to and told exactly what's going on. However, if they are not constantly reminded by different levels of union officials they live in a cloud cuckoo land with their big offices and large salaries.

We are often told of "management's right to manage". Yet, management's agenda and the interests of workers are always at opposites - management wanting maximum profits and minimum overheads (ie. to pay the lowest wages possible), and workers' knowing that it is their labour, not management's, that creates the products. When we take industrial action, we reject management's right to manage - what do you see as an alternative?
Unfortunately, the last weapon is to withdraw labour, and Britain is the only country in Europe where you can be sacked while in official dispute. There must be a change of law.

I understand that several months into the dispute the picket of sacked MAGNET workers outside the plant in Darlington was attacked. Can you tell us more about this?
Our shelters were burnt out on one occasion. On another, several of our older pickets were attacked with sticks late at night by 7 youths, who were recognised as scab workers. On another occasion, petrol was thrown into our gaslit portacabin. This is the only incident acted on. The man was charged with causing an affray.

What effect did it have on your actions and plans?
It increased our determination to win the dispute.

What would you ask people reading this to do? How can trade unionists best give you support and what can those of us wanting to do something do?
Leaflet a showroom – daily if possible. This always gets reported to the head office; Berisford, 1, Baker St, London (Alan Bowkett, Chief Executive). Write to them and complain. We will not lose this dispute through lack of determination and the will to win, but we may through lack of physical and financial support. Please don't let that happen!

SEND DONATIONS (T-shirts, badges etc. available):
Ian Crummond, Magnet Hardship Fund,
109, Jedburgh Drive, Darlington, Co. Durham.
If you want help with joining or organising showroom pickets in your local area, you can contact Norwich Solidarity Federation (address inside front cover of DA).

Support the 31 Critchley Strikers
Former staff of the Critchley Label Company lost their jobs almost a year ago following a union recognition dispute. They were replaced by SCABs.
Donations to "Critchley Strikers Social Fund"
Wendy Williams, 4 Cae Celyn, Croespenmaen, Crumlin, Gwent, Wales.

dockers stay solid

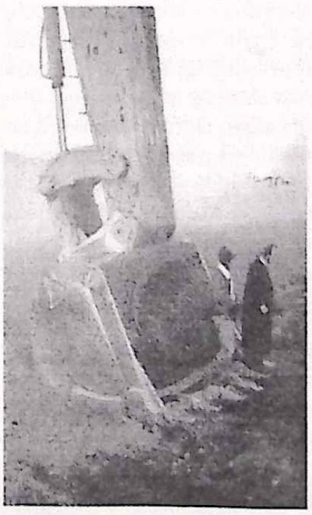
Around a hundred dockers gather in the cold early morning. The calm is punctuated regularly by the 'scabbers' calls as Mersey Docks bosses and scab workers head past. The mugs of coffee keep coming as regularly as the calls, until the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company Chief Executive, Trevor Furlong, arrives for work, signalling the end of another morning picket. After well over two years on strike, the dockers had yet another secret ballot forced on them by Bill Morris, General Secretary of the TGWU, in October. They voted overwhelmingly against taking the £28,000 bribes to abandon the Torside workers and give up the fight for their own jobs. If anyone tries to tell you your trade union leaders will look after you, or that Labour is better than nothing, tell them MDHC is part-(labour) government owned, and Tony doesn't give a shit about justice.

Boycott Argos

While many companies have stopped using the Port of Liverpool, Argos continue to pay MBHC to lock out the Liverpool Dockers.

Info/support/donations- Merseyside Port Shop Stewards, c/o TGWU, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool L3 8ER.

no opencast



Occupations and protests against opencast coal mines continue amidst pit closure alerts, bringing the economic fallacy of opencast into perspective. Opencast destroys local jobs in both the coal industry and other sectors who won't locate near opencasting. The health and environmental lunacy of it no longer needs proving. So why exactly does it carry on? Why are Labour 'unable to interfere' beyond planning controls? And why is the sky green and the fields blue?

global warning

Will the world economies slump? This is the question being asked by a number of economists. But before rushing out and celebrating the end of capitalism, it should be realised that excess supply idea is not the only hyped up theory doing the rounds in the new global market of economic ideas. Take, for instance, that darling of the American right, the "new paradigm." This notion argues that, due to global competition and technological advances, economic slumps are now a thing of the past, and that we can all look forward to a world overflowing with capitalist milk and honey.

Yet, the possibility of a world slump does deserve to be taken seriously. Not least because the problem of overproduction leading to economic slump is one of the fundamental flaws that has always dogged capitalism. Those worrying that capitalism may be about to nose dive into slump argue that the current boom in world production is resulting in an excess of supply over demand, which will lead to a period of world-wide deflation. Furthermore, they argue that the economic slow down now taking place in East Asia will only bring forward the day of reckoning. The Asian tiger economies, faced with a domestic slump, will take advantage of the falling value of their currencies to export more to the developed world, adding to the problem of over-capacity.

Not surprisingly, the champions of the free market have rushed to rubbish this new excess supply theory. They question the very idea that there is an overall excess of supply over demand. Producing a wealth of statistics, they demonstrate that, in fact, the real problem is that of demand outstripping supply. They point to the American economy, now running at full stretch, as an economy in danger of slipping into inflation.

This economic white wash being applied by the free marketeers cannot totally conceal the danger of a world slump. The danger of over-capacity may not pose such a threat yet. However, with the financial crisis engulfing the East Asian economies worsening and spreading to economic heavyweights such as Japan, a world slump looks more on the cards. Predictably, this is when governments rush in and prevent the free market from collapse, as with the recent Japanese underwriting and that previously in East Asia and Latin America (the latter alone totalled US$250 billion). Similar cases have already been seen in a number of minor financial disasters in the developed world, such as the American "saving and loan" scandal.

Hang on a minute! I thought we now lived in a global market in which the nation state has been rendered powerless? Silly me! I am getting confused. The global market only makes it impossible for the nation state to intervene in its own domestic economy to provide paraphernalia like jobs, a decent health service, etc. The global market idea most definitely does not apply when nation states intervene to stave off a world financial crisis by handing over billions to international financiers, in order to prevent corrupt bankers from going under. Clear? DA

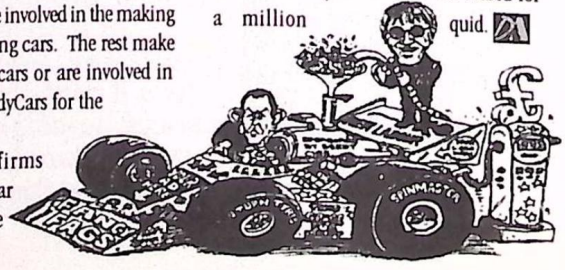
new labour, same bribes

Remember the hyperbole that surrounded Labour's plans to exclude Formula One racing from the proposed tobacco-advertising ban and the subsequent revelations that Labour had been paid £1 million by Bernie Ecclestone? All sides in this exaggerated drama that claimed that their only concern were the 50,000 manufacturing jobs said to be dependent on Formula One Racing.

The reality was somewhat different. Amazingly, it turns out it was votes, papersales and bankbalances, not jobs, which drove this sorry affair. This was more than illustrated by the fact that no one bothered to find out how many jobs were involved in Formula One production and in what way these jobs were threatened by a tobacco ban. The truth is that only 8000 workers in Britain are involved in the making of Formula One racing cars. The rest make lower formula race cars or are involved in the production of IndyCars for the American circuit.

All these firms involved in racing car production are located in the south-east and are, in many ways, inter-dependent. The argument that if the British Grand Prix was lost, this cluster of racing car specialists would have up stacks and left Britain, is pure nonsense. British production of racing cars is dependent on specialist skills and low cost, not on a racing event. Despite not one single IndyCar race event ever being staged here, Britain remains a centre of IndyCar manufacturing.

The truth is Bernie Ecclestone is not involved in car production of any type, but in the ownership of the rights to televise Formula One Racing, his company being floated on the stock exchange early in 1997. The floatation was hit by concerns that restrictions on tobacco advertising may effect the company's prospects. Then, someone mentioned Tony could be bribed for a million quid. DA



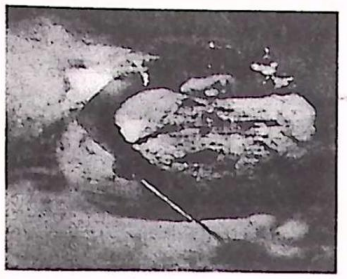
Offrail Offtrack

The Southall train disaster should have demonstrated that rail privatisation is costing lives. The media chose to ignore this. Instead, they concentrated on the fact that the train driver had been arrested. What the media failed to mention was that this poor man's "crime" of falling asleep only came about because he had been driving trains for over ten hours. The reason he had been driving for such a long period was that the drivers' working day has recently been extended from a maximum of nine hours to eleven. The increase in the drivers' working day was part of a productivity package recently introduced by management to save money. This new productivity package was only the latest in a long line of cost saving measures that has decimated working conditions on the railways over the last fifteen years.

The media also failed to mention that the AWS on one of the trains involved had been isolated, the AWS system being a safety device that alerts the driver that a signal set at danger is being approached. The regulations that cover the safe running of trains make it quite clear that if a fault occurs on the AWS, the train should be immediately taken out of service. Not only was this not done, the train actually entered service that day with the AWS isolated. The driver had refused to take the train into service because of the isolated AWS, but was ordered to do so by management. The reason for this total disregard for basic safety was justified by management on the grounds of cost. To take the train to be repaired at that point would have involved the company running the train out of course, and so incurring an automatic financial penalty from Railtrack.

The response from the normally tame train regulator was to issue a warning to all train companies that such a blatant breach of safety regulations would in the future not be tolerated.

Sadly, breaches of safety regulation are now the norm on the railways. The ethos that once governed the railways that passenger safety is paramount has long gone. Profit is now the ethos that rules, an ethos funded by deteriorating working conditions and ultimately passengers' lives. DA



CANADA

In October 120,000 teachers went out on strike in Ontario. The conservative government is trying to strip teachers of their collective bargaining rights by centralising all decision-making powers to the cabinet. Local control of education is being cut away in the name of creating better standards. Power from teachers, parents, school trustees over education is being thrust aside, so a very small group of un-elected officials of the government can dictate how the "system" should run. This means total control over the budget, teachers' prep time, class size, users' fees, etc., in an attempt to crush the public school system and privatise it.

Students and parents have been very supportive, creating signs and demonstrating in front of the schools. Solidarity is crucial in the fight against the government!

Also in Canada:

Unions, community groups and social activists closed Windsor, a city in southern Ontario, on Friday 17 October. Thousands upon thousands of workers converged at Dieppe Park. Banners, flags and chants filled the air as many took to the streets in protest for the first time in their lives. 90% of workplaces were effectively shut down as people exercised their right to protest against the government agenda of public sector cuts. Workers from every sector then took to the streets to send a message to the Ontario Tories. Thousands of teachers marched and stood on picket lines beside auto, postal, construction workers and teamsters, defying the employers' threats of financial penalties. Downtown Windsor was desolate until the workers came marching in, reclaiming their community.

MEXICO

A historic battle is being waged in Tijuana, Mexico. Asian and US companies have been rushing to Mexico to pay low wages and avoid health, safety and environmental regulations. When workers try to organise, they are fired, beaten or blacklisted.

Workers who produce chassis and platforms for Hyundai's tractor-trailer-truck division began to organise in May to form a union. They were suffering from tremendous health and safety problems (burns, loss of vision, broken bones and other injuries) as a result of welding without basic health and safety protections. Most were being paid less than $4 a day. The workers have been struggling for months, carrying out stoppages, demonstrations and other actions. The company has fired eight workers and has begun a campaign of intimidation against them. On October 6th, the workers had the opportunity to vote for a "phantom union", whose representatives are paid by the bosses for a "protection contract".

Centred on the recent events in Tijuana, a boycott has been organised: demonstrations, letters, any other support action welcome! Join the boycott and send a letter to your local Hyundai dealers today!

GREECE

In October, thousands of Greek workers marched to Parliament to demand better pay as a 24-hour general strike halted transport and disrupted industry and state services.The demonstrators, waving black flags and banners, marched through the centre of Athens chanting anti-government slogans.

Domestic and international flights had to be rescheduled; buses and trains were halted during peak hours; state hospitals and banks were on minimal staff...95% of workers in the industry sector participated actively in the strike.

FRANCE

French truckers striking over pay and work conditions organised a nation-wide blockade of key transportation points in what was seen as a major challenge for socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who came to power in June with a pledge to curb unemployment and create jobs.

The truckers began the strike by setting up well over 100 roadblocks to deny access to main roads, fuel depots and border crossings. Only trucks were being stopped in most places, with private cars being allowed to trickle through, but long queues of traffic built up. Riot police reopened border crossing points with Spain and Germany by force. But roadblocks stopped freight traffic from Channel ferries at Calais, the Channel tunnel and along the main route into Belgium.

The French public is said to be generally sympathetic with the truckers, who are known to be paid less than their counterparts in other parts of Western Europe.

The truckers accuse employers of reneging on key elements of an agreement reached after a similar 12-day strike brought France to a virtual standstill last year.

The French workers have shown the way forward. There's no point in accepting the drive for "flexibility", which turns the worker into little more than a machine, to be exploited as much as possible at the lowest possible cost, intimidated into accepting low wages and poor conditions by the fear of unemployment.

RUSSIA

One Russian worker in four (more than 20 million people) is no longer paid regularly and delays can be as long as six or even twelve months. The state and the employers owe $10 billion in unpaid wages.

Pineapples are cheaper than potatoes in the southern Russian port of Taganrog at the moment because dockers have been paid with tins of the exotic fruit rather than in roubles. Dockers were selling the tins on the streets to raise cash to buy food for their families.

Russian seamstresses in Voshkod, saying they want "to live, not die", refused to accept coffins as barter payment, asking for grocery carts instead, to transport vegetables from their land plots.

Shit wages – or shit for wages: "Payment in kind" took a turn for the worse in October, when employers at a large state farm in Vologda, northern Russia, adopted the policy of remunerating workers with agricultural goods in an effort to compensate for months of unpaid salaries. Instead of receiving vegetables, they were paid with piles of manure; special trucks were laid on to deliver "salaries" to the workers' doorsteps.

Some blame enterprise directors for the non-payment of wages, others blame the government. The International Inter-Governmental Organisations, especially the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, must share in the responsibility. The specific reasons for the non-payment of wages are different in every case. But what all the cases have

in common is that each and every one is gross violation of workers' rights.

Workers have responded to non-payment in many ways. Local strikes are erupting all the time. Hunger strikes and workplace occupations are constantly organised. Acts of "civil disobedience" include the blocking of railway lines and roads, and a nation-wide strike took place on November 5th.

USA

On November 6, demanding an end to "fast-track" destruction of the Amazon and the earth's climate, environmentalists disrupted a US government sponsored conference designed to promote US investment in Latin America ($6.4 billion in new gas production and $8.4 billion in new oil production). In protest of Clinton's request for "fast-track" authority, a banner was unfurled and alarm bells rang inside the conference room.

With "fast-track" authority, corporations cutting deals at the Atlanta conference will have even more government backing to drill new oil and gas reserves, dredge and dam rivers, and destroy the Amazon with no meaningful environmental safeguards.

The Amazon is the largest rainforest on the planet and acts as a vital "sink" for greenhouse gases, slowing the pace of climate change. Deforestation and unbridled exploitation of fossil fuels are two of the leading causes of climate change.

Stop the tropical chop! Use sustainable or recycled wood products or simply reduce your wood consumption.

Rainforests are the home of 50% of the world's species and 50 million indigenous peoples. By boycotting rainforests woods, like mahogany, teak, lauan and ramin, you can help save our most important ecosystems!

FRANCE

In Britain, what passes for the left, such as the SWP, calls for Labour to be voted in and then mock horror urges us to lobby David Blunkett et al when he proposes fees. This is ultimately a conformist strategy which disappears in a vortex of its own making without us getting any further forward. Our sister organisation in France, the CNT, has other ideas along with a good proportion of students and administrators.

Earlier this year, the CNT-IWA staged an occupation of a school's administration building in Doubs, near Besancon in order to table certain demands on staffing levels, contracts, the reinstatement of 8 teachers and other matters too complicated to detail here in a short space (the international secretary has details in French).

This and other actions like it just go to show what non-violent direct action can achieve. DA would welcome this kind of activity in UK universities (and elsewhere). By using tactics such as these, we can build a radical movement with broad aims, one that is not locked into the putrefied politics of what passes for the left.

CANADA

In September, Montreal activists got together to paint a bike lane on Milton Street, in the McGill ghetto, using yellow tempera paint, rollers and stencils to paint the six blocks between Park Avenue and University Street.

After an hour, the police started handing out fines. The activists plan to challenge the case in court. Issues involved include the right to political expression, the pressing ecological need to move away from car based transportation systems, and the fact that no property damage was done with the washable tempera paint. (A passing tagger pointed out that it is almost impossible to get a conviction for graffiti drawn with chalk or tempera because they wash off with the rain.)

CUBA: usabomber

As anarcho-syndicalists, we oppose bombing campaigns, even if we support the causes that lay behind the bombing. This is supposedly the position of western democracies, who routinely denounce those involved in bombing campaigns as cowardly terrorist. Behind all this noise and bluster, the reality is that the western democracies' attitude to bombing campaigns varies according to who is doing the bombing and who is being bombed.

Witness the outcry that accompanies bombing attacks on Israel. All the western democracies rush to condemn the bombers. The Palestinians are accused of being "soft on terrorism", while the western media competes to get the "best" shot of terrible human suffering.

Compare this with the deafening silence that has accompanied the long running bombing campaign aimed at crippling Cuba's booming tourist industry. A number of bombs have been exploded in Cuba's top tourist hotels in the hope of sabotaging the only real money maker in an otherwise sanction bound crippled economy. The Cubans blame the American government pointing to past plots by the CIA to murder Cuban leaders. Others pin the blame on the violently anti-Castro groups based in Miami.

Perhaps the real identity of the Cuban bombers will never be known. But what cannot be denied is that the American government has allowed anti-Castro groups, based in Miami, to organise attacks against Cuban and US citizens for over 30 years, the latest of which being the firebombing of travel agencies offering trips to Cuba. In all that time, virtually no prosecutions have been brought against anti-Castro groups. Even when the perpetrators of violent acts openly admit their guilt, they seem immune from prosecution. The Cuban government has long bitterly complained about a US citizen who openly admits that he planted a bomb on a Cuban airliner in 1976, killing 73 people, and who has never been prosecuted.

We wonder, as the US government openly protects these anti-Castro groups, why the rest of the western democracies are not rushing in and accusing the US of being "soft on terrorism" and introducing economic sanctions. Could it be that governments care little about the methods of the bomber and much more about their own interest? No, only a twisted revolutionary could think such a thing.

Truthpulling

burying South Africa's past

It was recently the turn of the security policeman, Jeffrey Benzien, to come before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This fine human being contribution to human knowledge was the "wet bag" torture technique, a technique he demonstrated to the commission (see picture). He explained that he knew when to release the bag, as the body would go slag. In that way, he could stop short of killing the prisoner. He was asked by a member of the audience, who had been one of his victims, what kind of a man he was that could place a wet bag on another human being, repeatedly listen to those moans and cries, taking each of those people very near to death.

The suffering of the South African people is far from over. South Africa remains one of the world's most unequal countries. Although the gap between rich and poor has narrowed since the ending of apartheid, this narrowing is entirely due to growing wealth of the new black middle classes. Figures show that the number of blacks among the richest fifth country rose from 2% to 6% between 1990-95, while poverty has increased for the poorest fifth of the population over the same period.

These figures should come as no surprise. The ANC government has pursued free market economic policies that would have made Thatcher proud. The effect of these policies has been to push unskilled black workers even deeper into poverty, while educated blacks are enjoying an economic boom, a boom fuelled by burgeoning bureaucratic patronage, and once white-only companies, keen to carry favour, with the offer of lavish salaries and flash cars.

Sadly, the hammer of apartheid, the black trade union movement, is being increasingly sidelined. The government is now embarking on a wide-ranging privatisation programme blocked in the past by union opposition. A number of radio stations and part of the telephone company have already been sold off, while airlines, airports, diamond mines and parcel services are all set to go under the hammer. There is even talk of some unions setting up investment companies to buy shares. For many South Africans trapped in appalling poverty, liberation must still seem a long way off.

Housing the legacy of apartheid

The housing crisis in South Africa is massive. About a fifth of the population live in squatter camps. Millions more live in broken down hostels, or in overcrowded formal housing. By contrast, the rich live in houses that are far too large for their needs.

The housing crisis also reflects the effects of capitalism and the State, particularly in their brutal Apartheid form. Low-cost urban housing was deliberately neglected by the State in the 1960s and 1970s. The aim was to prevent African people from settling in the cities; the idea was that African workers' "real" homes were in the homelands and that they were thus just temporary visitors to the towns and did not "need" proper housing.

Secondly, the collapse of the peasant economies of the homelands sent millions fleeing from rural devastation to try to get a better life in the city. This crisis was largely due to the racist and unjust land reservation system, which gave 87% of the land to white capitalist farmers, and the migrant labour system which drained labour off the land. At the same time, the capitalist farmers have been replacing farm workers with machines such as combine harvesters (provided cheaply by the State) and, as a result, evicting further numbers of people.

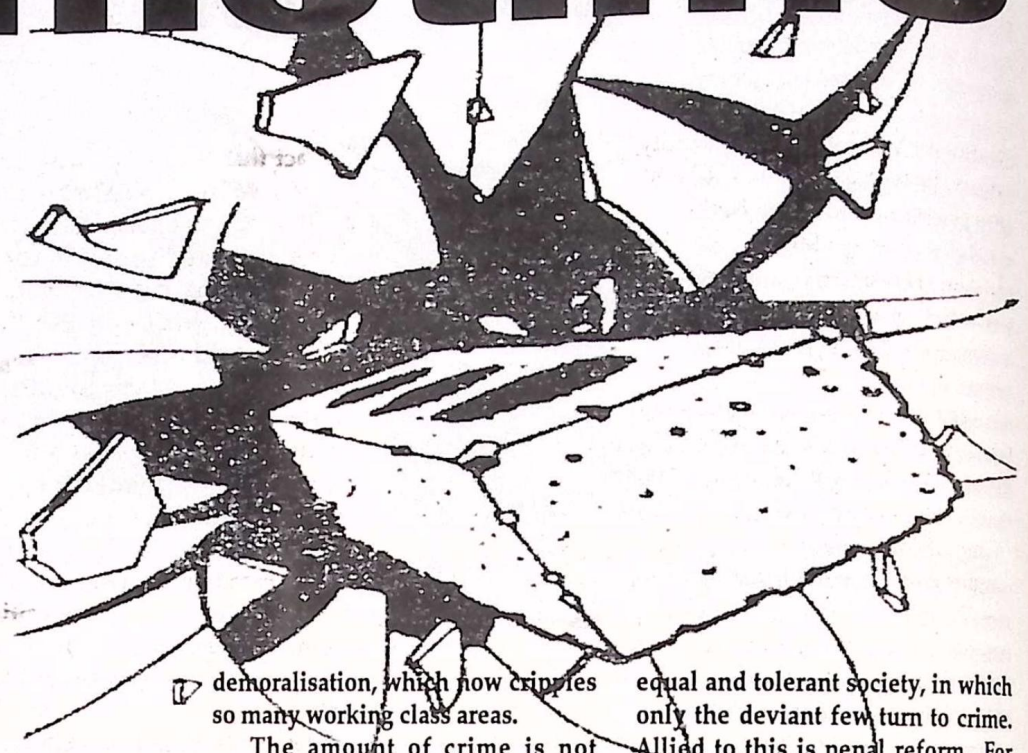
When the pass laws were abolished in 1986, these people were able to come to the cities, but the State and capital have consistently not provided adequate housing. Reason one is profit: the companies do not want to spend their money on providing basic facilities to the unprofitable poor, whilst the State does not want to increase taxes on the companies to fund a housing programme. In addition, three other factors come into play: firstly, under capitalism, the right to private property is seen by those in power as more important than the right to life, and thus squatters are typically chased off the land by the police if they are residing in defiance of some blood-soaked (colonially derived) land deed. Second, the State always panders to the rich, and thus is happy to evict the poor when they live near the rich, and maybe affect property values. Thirdly, the State is an inefficient bureaucratic monstrosity that is quite effective at deploying police, defending capitalism etc., but hopeless when it comes to providing for our basic needs. Instead, much of the (already inadequate) money gets "eaten up" by the bureaucracy, consultants, corrupt officials and so on.

In terms of immediate demands, we support squatting, land invasions and take-overs of unused buildings. Also important, however, would be to take mass action to put pressure on the bosses and rulers to provide housing, which should be of a decent quality, should provide jobs for local people such as the homeless, and should meet the needs of the people concerned. In the course of such struggles and actions, it is important to build links between squatters and other sections of the workers and the poor such as unions in the workplace, and working-class people in formal housing.

We also argue that the issue of homelessness needs to be linked up to other popular demands such as lower rents and the struggle against unemployment. Building these links is important because it prevents the struggles of the homeless from being isolated and picked off one by one, because it links squatters to the power of the organised working class in the workplace, and because it makes it difficult for the bosses and the rulers to divide and rule the class by playing off squatters against other workers (something which has already happened). Ultimately, however, we do not think that the housing question can be fully solved under the current system.

Sourced from "What is anarcho- syndicalism" by the WSF of South Africa
Wsf_sa@geocities.com
http:///www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/7017

crimetime



Crime increasingly pollutes our society. Rich or poor, it's impossible to avoid its effects. This has resulted in crime prevention becoming one of the major issues of our time.

Curiously, although the radical left have a clear understanding as to why crime exists, they have given little thought as to how it might be prevented. This cannot be allowed to continue. If a radical alternative to the present capitalist system is to be developed, crime must be debated and solutions found for its eradication.

Crime, and the threat of it, affects society as a whole, and the working class in particular. Its effects should not be underestimated. Besides, it is a mistake to see only violent crime as the major problem. Theft also brings out strong emotions, a sense of violation and intimidation, for example, that go beyond the mere loss of goods. It also brings about a sense of insecurity rooted in the fear that the thief can return at any time.

crimes against community

Nor do these feelings just affect the immediate victim. In some areas crime is so prevalent, it leads to a communal sense of insecurity, which manifests itself in many ways. There's unease about going out because of the fear of attack or abuse. Even inside the home, there's the feeling that we're not safe. There's the ever-present worry that children will come to some harm, or be sucked into criminal behaviour. Such effects go beyond the physical, becoming part of our mental state and often leading to mental health problems. In these terms, crime should be seen for what it is - an act of oppression impacting on daily life. It is a major contributor to the sense of decay and demoralisation, which now cripples so many working class areas.

the political right have long had the most populist solution - "string 'em up"

The amount of crime is not disputed, however the cure for it, is. The political right have long had the most populist solution - "string 'em up". For the right, crime is part of the natural human condition. It can never be eradicated, only contained by the fear of punishment. Their basic idea is that the more savage the punishment, the better the deterrent. Such simplistic nonsense gave rise to the "Boot Camp", where brutality was expected to instil a sense of citizenship. Instead, it has brought us more brutalised young people. If nothing else, the last twenty years have exposed these ideas as absurd. Tougher sentencing does not lead to less crime, only more prisons. Thatcherism saw increasing punishment alongside ever-increasing crime. The deterrent, for all its popular support, has been seen to fail.

Social democracy, with its more human face, has attempted a much more sophisticated analysis, relating criminal behaviour to the social environment. Factors such as poor education, unemployment, poverty, "broken" homes and general social deprivation are seen as the causes of crime. The key to reducing it is to end social division through social reform, bringing about a more just, equal and tolerant society, in which only the deviant few turn to crime. Allied to this is penal reform. For social democrats, the role of prisons is to reform criminal behaviour and to return rehabilitated offenders to a "normal" life within "normal" society.

This social democratic analysis of crime is problematic. It takes no account of the fact that the middle-classes also commit crime. Crime is seen to be caused by poverty alone and is therefore only committed by the working classes. However, the biggest challenge to this view is seen in the economic changes since the 1970's. Central to the social democratic approach, is the idea that crime could be controlled through government intervention. The rise of free market ideas and the re-emergence of mass unemployment and gross inequality has all but killed off this proposition.

buckling under the strain

Under constant attack for favouring outdated notions of state intervention and being "soft" on crime, social democracy has all but buckled under the strain. They have continually modified their ideas to the point where they have reached the "tough on crime, tough on the

and after

causes of crime" solution. In reality, this is nothing more than the right-wing deterrent solution, backed by an authoritarian state introducing draconian measures like curfews and welfare-to-work programmes.

the left problem

Now we turn our attention to the left wing assessment of crime, particularly that of the Marxist left. This is bound up with the general left wing critique of capitalism, which argues that the main function of the legal system is to protect existing property relations. These are based on theft themselves - the theft by the capitalist, from the worker, of that element of production classed as profit. The left argues that it is the exploitative nature of the capitalist mode of production that spawns attitudes and conditions that cause criminal behaviour. In short, the criminal is a product of capitalism. From this position the left has developed a sophisticated critique of the legal system, highlighting its contradictions and the nature of class prejudice, upon which the legal system is built.

There is much merit in the left's critique, but one glaring flaw - the solution to crime. The left argue that criminal behaviour will only end when the capitalist form of production is replaced. The problem is that it kicks the problem into the future - crime will end after a future revolution.

The reasons for this postponement lie partially in the problems presented by offering an immediate solution to crime. The left see criminal behaviour originating from capitalism itself. Thus, the criminal is seen as a victim. To offer immediate solutions to crime, therefore, means restricting or, in some way, deterring the criminal - or, in other words, punishing victims of capitalism, which the left reject.

This confusion is worsened by the fact that Marxists organise into political parties. The difficulty with this form of organisation is that, this side of forming a revolutionary government, the action they can take is limited. They can only attempt to use their political perspective to try and influence existing structures by shaping opinion. For example, they can try to influence workers in the unions, or they can make demands on the state. While it may be legitimate for the left to call on the government to provide a better health or education service, calling for the state to take tougher action against crime is a different matter. Calling for more bobbies on the streets, or for tougher sentencing, is not exactly the traditional rallying cry of the left. It is little wonder, then, that solutions to crime are put off until after the revolution.

we cannot be put into the position of arguing that oppression justifies further oppression

And so, we come to the anarcho-syndicalist approach to crime. Our critique has much in common with the Marxist one. Perhaps the only difference is that we would argue that not all criminal behaviour is based on economic relations. We see some crimes, such as rape for example, as rooted in power relations that exist in society. We would therefore argue that these forms of criminal behaviour could continue even if the capitalist economic system were to be replaced.

While anarcho-syndicalism may share much of the Marxist critique of crime, the way we organise enables us to put forward radically different solutions. Before proposing any anarcho-syndicalist solutions, however, perhaps it would be best to first discuss the general anarchist view of crime. I feel there are major differences between the two approaches and, to avoid confusion, they should be contrasted.

Many anarchists take the idea of the criminal as the victim of crime a stage further. They argue that criminal activity is a form of class struggle. This is best summed up by the slogan that prisoners are "in prison for us, and we are outside for them". From this starting point, some go on to adopt the methods used in crime as methods of collective struggle. Hence, slogans like "rob the rich" and "kill the rich".

This anarchist view of crime has a number of problems. Most obviously, since most crime committed by working class criminals is against other working class people, it is hard to see how criminal behaviour is a form of class struggle. Furthermore, even if collective working class attacks on the rich could be organised, are they justifiable or acceptable? Even if such attacks were considered a justifiable tactic, how would they be controlled? By their very nature, they would have to be clandestine and, therefore, beyond democratic control. Finally, even if these obstacles were overcome, history shows that the means all too often becomes the end, with the methods of struggle polluting the struggle itself.

an anarcho-syndicalist approach

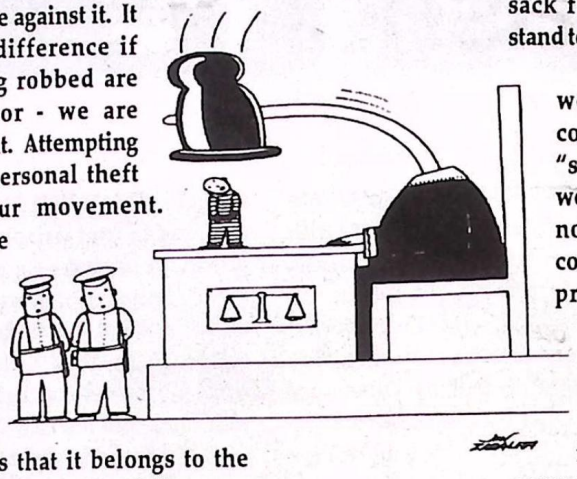
As to the anarcho-syndicalist approach to crime, perhaps it would be best to start with the straightforward proposition that anarcho-syndicalism should be against crime. I am fully aware that this is controversial, so I will expand.

Anarcho-syndicalism should be unequivocal in making it clear that we are against random and personal acts of violence. Violence should not be portrayed as heroic or glamorous, just plain nasty. Anarcho-syndicalism should only countenance violence to defend collective action and the general movement. In any other form, we are opposed to it, and will condemn it.

(cont'd on next page..)

(cont'd from last page..)

We should be equally straightforward in our approach to theft. We are against it. It makes no difference if those being robbed are rich or poor - we are opposed to it. Attempting to justify personal theft debases our movement. Finally, we should oppose senseless attacks on property, merely on the grounds that it belongs to the "rich", as nonsense. I am fully aware that any collective action may cause damage. That is a different issue. The aim of anarcho-syndicalism has always been to take over property owned by capitalists in order to utilise it for the collective good. We seek to take over the means of production, not destroy it.



organising anti-crime

Condemning crime is not enough, however. Anarcho-syndicalists must organise against it even though, attempting to do so, presents us with a major conflict of interest. To aid the victims of crime means confronting the perpetrators, who are often some of the worst casualties of the present system, for example those mortally addicted to drugs, who turn to crime to feed their addiction. However, we cannot be put into the position of arguing that oppression justifies further oppression. Crime attacks the social fabric of a community, which in turn leads to further alienation and crime. It is a downward spiral that has to be halted.

Having first accepted that anarcho-syndicalism is opposed to crime, we can begin to apply our traditional methods of organising. Although attempting to organise against crime may bring apparent conflicts of interest, this is hardly a new situation. All collective action involves overcoming conflicts of interest. For instance, in workplaces, where ensuring unity means overcoming the conflict between the individual worker's interest and the collective interest. This may entail convincing individuals that, although they are threatened with the sack for taking action, they must stand together for the collective good.

Securing unity in the workplace is much more complex than simply shouting "scab", as the popular myth would have it. Solidarity does not just suddenly appear. It comes about through a continual process of argument and practical demonstration, which aims to continually demonstrate that it is only by acting collectively that the individual worker's interest is served. Solidarity is based on building trust among workers and isolating those who break that collective trust by scabbing.

collective crime-busting

It is by adopting this approach that we will overcome crime. We don't just argue our opposition to crime in isolation. Instead, we argue that it is only by working together that communities can overcome the many problems they face. This is a positive message of solidarity. Our opposition to crime does not simply stem from the fear and suffering it causes. We oppose it because it undermines the collective sense of community we seek to build - because it is the negation of our message of solidarity.

to aid the victims of crime means confronting the perpetrators

The fight against crime therefore starts by arguing for collective action. The basis of our beliefs is that people must organise collectively to take control of the problems they face and overcome them, whether it be lack of transport, poor housing, run down schools or unhealthy working conditions. By doing so, the trust and solidarity needed to rebuild a spirit of community will be forged. As part of this approach, it must be constantly hammered home that criminal behaviour only undermines the solidarity needed for collective struggle. The aim is to channel anger away from criminal behaviour by involvement in positive action. In this way, we can slowly break down the culture of crime replacing it with a culture based on solidarity.

As we attempt to develop a new social movement based on this new sense of community, we will endeavour to isolate those who continue to carry on with a lifestyle based on crime. We will constantly highlight the suffering criminal behaviour causes and argue that it undermines community efforts. It will be made plain that criminals either accept the support offered to change their way of life, or accept the consequences. If these appeals do not work, we will organise against them. This initially would take the form of collective demonstrations and pickets, backed by ostracism, through to a general boycott of the individuals concerned.

The power of such a boycott should not be underestimated. Apart from the emotional pressures of a boycott, when strong enough, a well organised movement could bring economic pressure to bear in many ways. The criminal would not get served in pubs and shops; goods and services would no longer be delivered; and homes could even go without water and fuel. Any attempt to break this social boycott through the use of violence would be met with collective violence. If this process goes unheeded, the ultimate sanction of ejection from the community will be used. This would not merely be passing the problem on, because such a new social movement would not grow in isolation. The criminal would face a well organised movement operating regionally, nationally and eventually internationally.

following basic principles

This approach to crime would be merely following the traditional methods of anarcho-syndicalism. We have always sought to develop our ideas within practical realities. This interplay of ideas and actions is what allows us to react to an ever-changing world. Anarcho-syndicalists do not organise into political parities. Rather, we seek to build a broad-based movement, whose immediate aim is to improve peoples' lives by confronting capitalism. Through the process of organising to overcome immediate problems, we seek to organise a new social movement

capable of overthrowing capitalism and running a libertarian society. By taking a step by step approach to building solidarity in order to overcome crime, we will be helping to build this new social movement.

Crime is always going to be hard to overcome but we should not be overwhelmed by the many problems it presents. The level of crime in society is not fixed or preordained. Even under the present system, there are communities where crime is low. It is not utopian to argue that it is possible to develop a society, based on collective principles, that would be free of crime. However, such a society will not just suddenly materialise. It will have to evolve through a constant process of change. As anarcho-syndicalists, we can start this process of change by developing our ideas on crime, then putting those ideas into action and learning from our mistakes as we progress.

The alternative is to avoid the issue, in the hope that crime along with all other human failings will, in a blinding flash of revolutionary consciousness, disappear forever.

•Fed up with low wages and bad conditions?

•Poor Health and Safety standards?

Get in touch

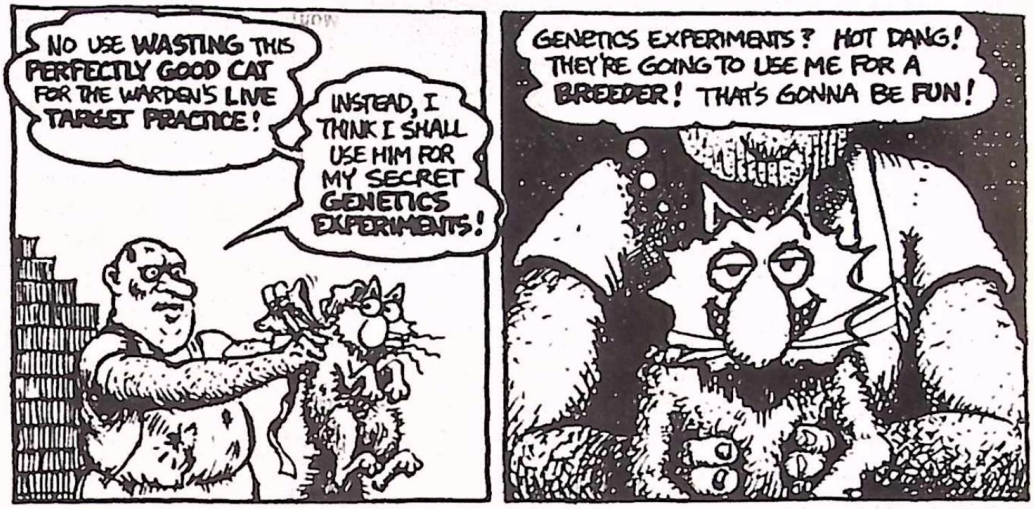
We aim to provide advice and assistance in organising in your workplace and fighting back against the boss.
We are independent of trade unions and political parties and we are committed to providing practical help.

Phone/fax us on 0181 374 5027

on 1st Wednesday of the month between 6-8pm or leave a message at any other time and we will get back to you
Please state that the message is for the Solidarity Federation

North London Solidarity Federation-
For organisation against bosses and bureaucrats
PO Box 1681 London N8 7LE

Cashcropping


NO USE WASTING THIS PERFECTLY GOOD CAT FOR THE WARDEN'S LIVE TARGET PRACTICE!
INSTEAD, I THINK I SHALL USE HIM FOR MY SECRET GENETICS EXPERIMENTS!
GENETICS EXPERIMENTS? HOT DANG! THEY'RE GOING TO USE ME FOR A BREEDER! THAT'S GONNA BE FUN!

(to be continued..)

Do not be surprised if you have not heard much about GM foods, because neither the chemical companies who produce them nor the government are exactly running public information campaigns about them.

Genetic engineering means that totally unrelated species of plants, animals and micro-organisms that cannot naturally interbreed can now be engineered to have each other's genetic material.

Now, just 20 odd years since this was discovered, experiments have produced genetically modified types of most major food crops and these have recently started to be given legal approval. This despite opposition from thousands of organisations who have highlighted the dangers and without informed public debate.

For example, GM soya beans, produced by Monsanto PLC, have been licensed, allowing them to be introduced widely into our food chain without separation from conventional beans and without labelling. Soya beans are used in an estimated 60% of processed foods such as bread, dairy products, pasta, confectionery, pizzas and baby foods, so it is likely that the vast majority of the general public will be exposed in the near future. Unlabelled!

A report by 100 US scientists suggested that genetically modified organisms (GMO's) could cause "...Irreversible, devastating damage to the ecology". British scientists have also spoken out.

Action against field trials of genetically engineered crop plants is rapidly spreading throughout the world. The Irish field trial action provoked a strong response from Monsanto, who had planned it – they said "The people who perpetrated this illegal act must be condemned in the most forthright manner". In August, Monsanto's glyphosate-resistant sugar beet was destroyed by the Gaelic Earth Liberation Front. In Australia, Mothers against Genetic Engineering destroyed a plot of AgrEvo's engineered rape seed.

In Denmark, a group called Danish Action Consumers went into supermarkets putting warning labels on products which contained genetically modified soya. The resulting media coverage led to the product being withdrawn.

So, challenge your nearest large supermarket to label/withdraw GM foods. They have a huge influence, but have so far generally supported GM foods. Otherwise, switch to buying from independent whole/health food stores, who are able to source GM free foods.

Sourced partly from GreenCity Genetics Campaign
GreenCity Genetics Campaign 23 Fleming Street, Dennistoun Glasgow G31 1PQ (Tel. 0141 554 7633) (contact for further info and to support/donate)

Towards a shoppers' strike

The BSE crisis brought public health issues into sharp focus. Here was something that was not a virus or bacteria but had been spread by the relentless pursuit of profit. Cattle had been turned into carnivores and cannibals by turning sub-standard meat and offal into animal feed. Medical science cannot deal yet with prions any more than the doctors of 19th Century British cities could deal with cholera.

Nowadays, anyone concerned with their health faces an intractable problem: there is no organised campaign about public health issues; there is no vested interest in good health. The market economy reigns supreme and, while food manufacturers don't want to kill the general population, the food that makes profit is not fresh. The answer is a community based campaign on all matters related to public health, not just related to the defence of the NHS and against health cuts, but taking in the provision of food, housing, clean water and air, and waste disposal.

Direct Action: DIY Labelling

Both food manufacturers and food retailers are conning shoppers. The labels on the packets and pictures in the ads bare little relation to the contents of the products. It is no surprise to most that food labelling deliberately misleads. The recent succession of food scares (salmonella, E-coli, and BSE) has helped to raise the question of food safety, but reports on food quality still rarely appear in the mass media, despite increasing awareness of food and labelling.

We need labelling that is honest. The Co-op supermarket chain have 'boldly' exposed the "seven deadly sins" of deceiving labels and pledged that their own range of products will conform to the new guidelines. It remains to be seen whether the rest of the food industry follows suit.

Governments, manufacturers and supermarket chains have strongly resisted calls for the tightening of food labelling. They know full well that if there is correct labelling, a highly organised campaign could wreak havoc on the sales of food products and consequently on the profits of those firms who sell them; already they can see a wave of boycotts and consumer actions looming.

While boycotts can have a very significant effect, these tactics need to be refined further, towards the shoppers' strike, where certain supermarkets and products are hit on a number of days. The existing food campaigns must be politicised. If manufacturers will not label their goods, it looks like consumers will have to do it for them!

captive animals...
chickens eat their dead...
dead sheep in cattle feed...
are we quite right in the head?
the meat squeezes out of the mincer...
it looks like SHIT to me...
it's in your pies and sausages...
and it's riddled with B·S·E·

So far 'only' 21 have died. 20 year old Vicky Rimmer was the first to be diagnosed in 1993, when she was just 16. She died in November after 4 years in a coma. She was once full of life and 'had never been ill in her life, never even had a cold', her mother said.

opinion: Planet Vegan

In dietary terms it refers to the practice of dispensing with all animal products, but why? Those of us from planet vegan who fail to even slightly blend in with earthlings are seen as nutters, often rightly so. This is because people claim the label for many reasons, both practical (environmental, anti-cruelty/ oppression) and esoteric (unhealthy hatred of humans for animals, abject lifestylism, spiritualism.. it gets worse). Not surprisingly, those tending towards the latter have no real thought-out ideas and tend to be incredibly judgemental, short sighted, and self-obsessed.

Are anarcho-syndicalists all going 'lifestylist'?

Erm no. 'Lifestylism' is usually used slightly derogatorily to describe people who do bugger all to bring about a decent alternative to capitalism, but instead choose to live within it. They see no point in organising, they instead trundle about doing their own thing and thereby giving their tacit support to the state. They often use the language of anarchism to describe themselves, but generally do very little - maybe it seems too difficult to engage with the present, or maybe the time for change doesn't seem right, or maybe it seems just too easy to shrink into a comfortable shell within some 'alternative' clique.

Isn't veganism lifestylist?

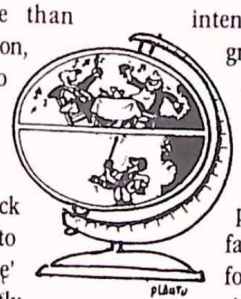
Yes. Changing your diet will never bring about an end to capitalism. Nor will boycotting foods; all food is produced within a rotten capitalist system. Even your veganic allotment is likely to involve capitalist products.

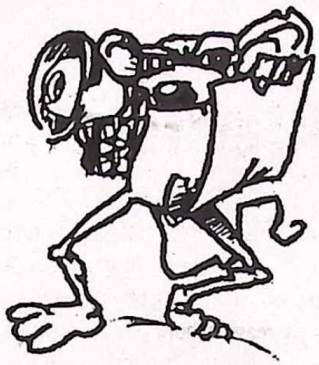
Isn't this a case of pointless 'holier than thou' self-labelling?

Many vegans practice their faith with evangelical flair, and in a heavy cloud of superiority. Approach with care, such people might be dangerous and are likely to harbour serious grudges towards earthlings. The labelling 'vegan' seems to promote an 'all or nothing' approach – which polarises people into extremes. Anti-vegans and religio-vegans are equally socially unhealthy.

Is there any merit in 'going vegan'?

Yes, if you can keep it in realistic perspective. Most importantly, it makes environmental sense. It takes far less work, waste, and environmental destruction to eat plant based products rather than feed them to animals and end up with only a fraction of the plants being turned into animal products (the rest becomes polluting animal waste). Land, energy and water resources for livestock agriculture range anywhere from 10-1000 times more than those needed to make the equivalent plant foods. Livestock agriculture ruins the environment far more than intensive farming of plants. Most of the world's soil erosion, groundwater depletion and deforestation, not to mention rural pollution, result from livestock agriculture. These are serious global threats. Over half of Africa's massive cash crop exports are of animal feed products for western livestock production. 70% of crops grown in the US are fed to farm animals. During the so-called Ethiopian 'famine' food production actually went up locally – perfectly edible products were being exported for cash to feed on western animals. We could feed our world more sustainably with plants than with animals – though the crucial barrier to sustainability is capitalism, not carnivores. By cutting out animal products we can reduce some of the worst ravages of the capitalist food supply racket while we get on with the job of building a more sensible political and economic system. After all, it would be useful to have some decent environment left to live in after capitalism.





veganism the FAQs

Adapted from Vegan-L FAQ at http://envirolink.org/arrs/faqvegan.html

The term 'vegan' is now general knowledge, as is the realisation that, despite what the milk and meat marketing boards say, it is not only easy to be healthy on non-animal products alone, with a little effort, its healthier. Here we look at a few of the possible compelling reasons for doing it.

What's Wrong With Dairy Products?

Dairy cows are made pregnant yearly to ensure they produce adequate milk. The least healthy calves will be slaughtered for pet food; to provide veal for veal & ham pies; or for rennet to be extracted from their stomachs for cheesemaking. Some females will be reared on milk substitutes to become dairy herd replacements and begin, at 18-24 months of age, the cycle of continual pregnancies. Some will be sold at market at 1-2 weeks of age, for rearing as beef in fattening pens and slaughtered after 11 months. Up to 80% of the beef produced in Britain is a by-product of the dairy industry. Over 170,000 calves die in Britain each year before they are three months old, due largely to neglectful husbandry and appalling treatment at markets. The massive doses of hormones and antibiotics fed to dairy cows are passed on to milk drinkers.

What's Wrong With Eggs?

The battery hen, from which the vast majority of all eggs are produced, is forced to spend 10 to 12 months squeezed inside a small wire cage with up to nine other tormented hens. Caged for life without exercise, they are constantly drained of calcium to form eggshells. Calcium depleted, millions of hens become paralysed and die of hunger and thirst inches from their food and water. Battery hens are debeaked with a hot machine blade once and often twice during their lives, which causes severe, chronic pain and suffering. Debeaking is done to offset the effects of the compulsive pecking that can afflict birds designed by nature to roam, scratch, and peck at the ground, and to save feed costs by promoting conversion of less food into more eggs. Suffice to say that so-called 'free range' eggs are mostly produced by similar factory farming methods, the only real difference being the hens are in large overcrowded sheds instead of small cages.

But Don't I Need Eggs And Dairy Products?

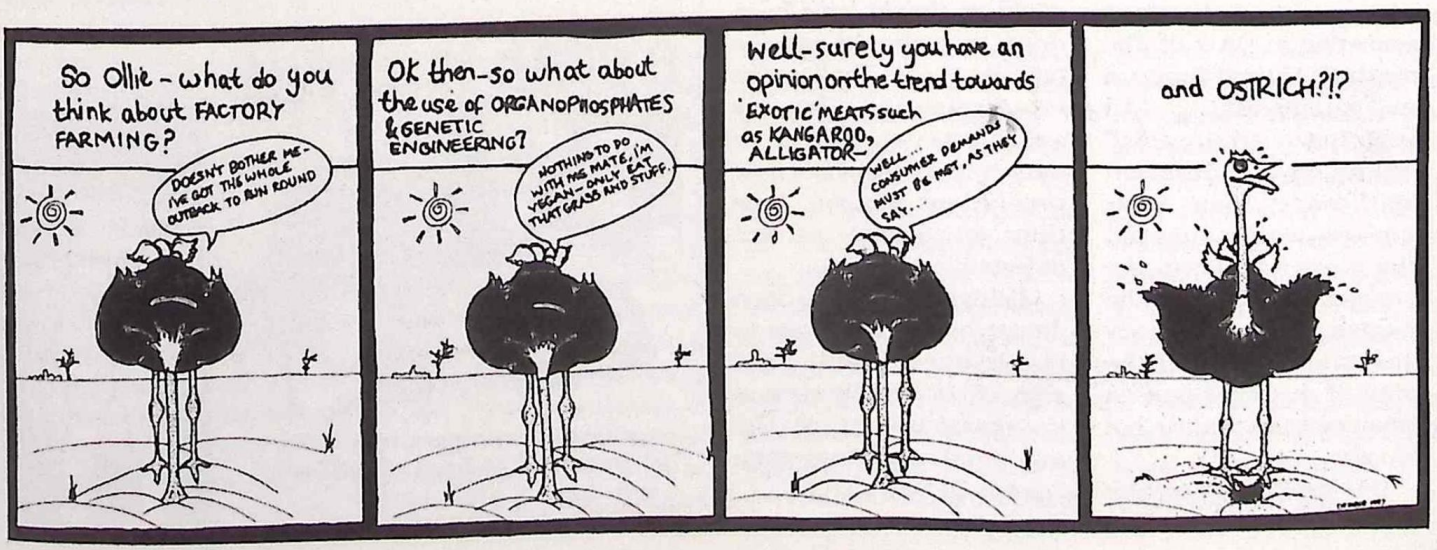
Just as the meat manufacturers would have you believe that you need to eat meat, the egg and dairy producers are now spending vast amounts of money trying to promote eggs and dairy products. Amongst other things, they contain large amounts of cholesterol and saturated fats, which is considered a major cause of heart disease. Dairy products also contain lactose, a milk sugar which the majority of the world's population is actually unable to digest and is often found to be the cause of digestive problems. Casein, the milk protein, has been shown to cause iron deficiency anaemia from internal bleeding in many infants and is suspected of causing juvenile diabetes.

What's Wrong With Wool?

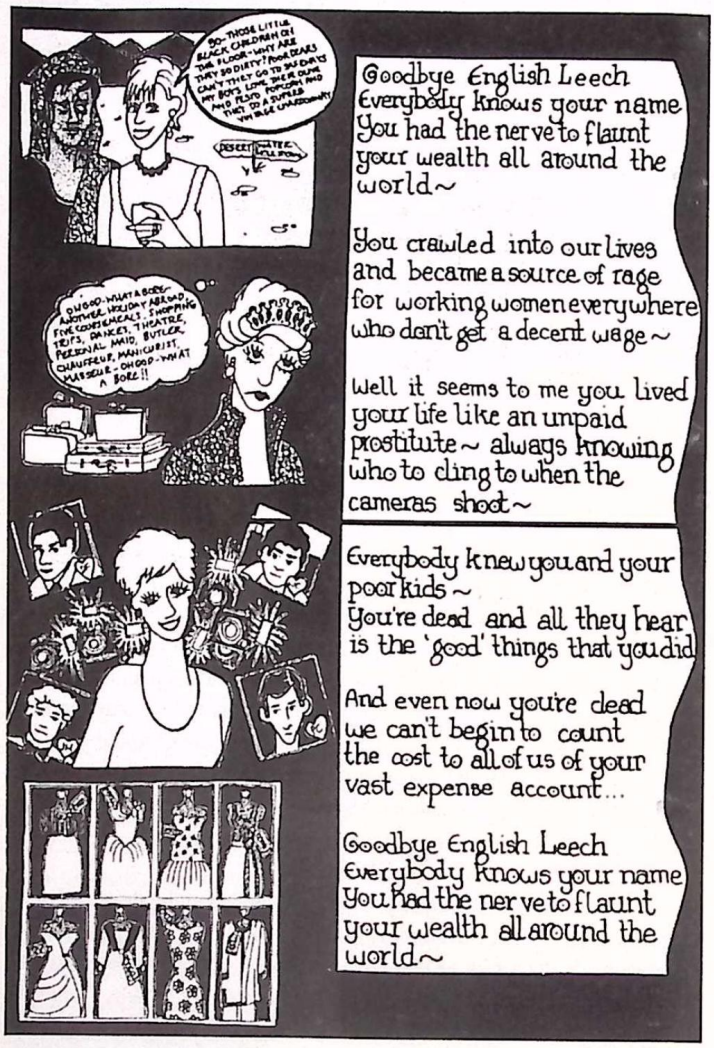
Scientists over the years have bred a Merino sheep, which is exaggeratedly wrinkled. The more wrinkles, the more wool. More wrinkles mean more perspiration and greater susceptibility to fly-strike, a ghastly condition resulting from a maggot infestation in the sweaty folds of the sheep's over-wrinkled skin. To counteract this, farmers now perform an operation without anaesthetic call 'mulesing' in which sections of flesh around the anus are sliced away, leaving a painful bloody wound. Without human interference, sheep would grow just enough wool to protect them from the weather, but scientific breeding techniques have ensured that these animals have become wool-producing monstrosities.

Why Not Leather?

Many leather goods are made from the by-products of the slaughterhouse, so while you may not be contributing to the destruction of animals, you will be contributing to the profits of these establishments. Some leather is purpose made; i.e. the animal is grown and slaughtered purely for its skin. Tanneries are amongst the most polluting industries. Modern hide-curing is extremely water intensive, and a cocktail of polluting chemicals and heavy metals are washed down the drain to pollute our water environment.


So Ollie - what do you think about FACTORY FARMING?
DOESN'T BOTHER ME - I'VE GOT THE WHOLE OUTBACK TO RUN ROUND
OK then - so what about the use of ORGANOPHOSPHATES & GENETIC ENGINEERING?
NOTHING TO DO WITH ME MATE, I'M VEGAN - ONLY EAT THAT GRASS AND STUFF.
Well - surely you have an opinion on the trend towards 'EXOTIC' MEATS such as KANGAROO, ALLIGATOR -
WELL... CONSUMER DEMANDS MUST BE MET, AS THEY SAY...
and OSTRICH?!?

letters


OOH - THOSE LITTLE BLACK CHILDREN ON THE FLOOR - WHY ARE THEY SO DIRTY? THEIR JEANS CAN'T TIGHT GO TO SKI BOOTS MY BOYS LOVE SPICE GIRLS AND PLAID POPCORN AND THEY'RE A SUPERB VIDEO CAMERAMAN!
OOOOO - WHAT A BORE - ANOTHER HOLIDAY ABROAD FIVE CONFIDENCIALS SHOPPING TRIPS, DANCES, THEATRE, PERSONAL MAID, BUTLER, CHAUFFEUR, MANICURIST, MASSEUSE - OHOOO - WHAT A BORE !!
Goodbye English Leech
Everybody knows your name
You had the nerve to flaunt
your wealth all around the
world~
You crawled into our lives
and became a source of rage
for working women everywhere
who don't get a decent wage~
Well it seems to me you lived
your life like an unpaid
prostitute~ always knowing
who to cling to when the
cameras shoot~
Everybody knew you and your
poor kids~
You're dead and all they hear
is the 'good' things that you did
And even now you're dead
we can't begin to count
the cost to all of us of your
vast expense account...
Goodbye English Leech
Everybody knows your name
You had the nerve to flaunt
your wealth all around the
world~

Dear DA,

In response to your hammering in DA 4 of The Friends Of Durruti Group, a few comments: 'An insignificant groupuscle?' Groups have a different significance than their numbers would suggest. This work is about the concrete problems of the Spanish revolutionary situation; to palm off the defeat of the revolution on circumstances is familiar, but too easy.

This book won't present all the answers on what could or should have been done, nor should anyone take as gospel Guillamons interpretations, but as anarchists we owe it to ourselves to think about how revolutions happen, how they go wrong or are defeated.

If this book helps to open debate on the right way to revolt, then it will have achieved as valuable a task as its reassessment of the maligned or forgotten Friends Of Durruti.

JP.

Did we get amass-hysterical glimpse into the void? Or are we mass-bored? The floods of letters suggest an upsurge in interest in the monarchy (or should that be Diana, the anti-monarchy) in September 1997 (only). Unfortunately, they are unprintable and column inches are too precious in this organ. So make up your own Skoda and dandruff jokes, and make do with a small selection of graphic interpretations. We'll keep the 10,000 word obituary for our special DA supplement (Diana-signed copies only £99.95+p&p - send money now to avoid disappointment). *ed.*

real fakes

Dear DA,

I was interested in the article on surveillance-counter-surveillance in DA3. I think your readers will be interested in what is available now if you have the money. It is now possible, with some £1,000 of software, to edit a video recording down to pixel level.

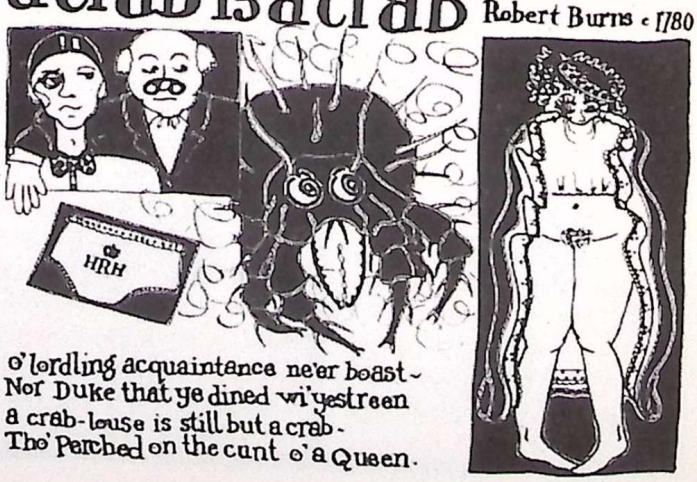
Now one can put a totally different face on a moving individual or change a vehicle numberplate. When the edited version is put back onto tape, it is more or less impossible to tell that it has been faked. Videotapes are now accepted in court as evidence in criminal cases. If the most sophisticated equipment was to be used by professionals, the resultant situation could be horrifying in the extreme. While it is true that all evidence can be falsified, here we have a totally different ball-game which will have far-reaching consequences.

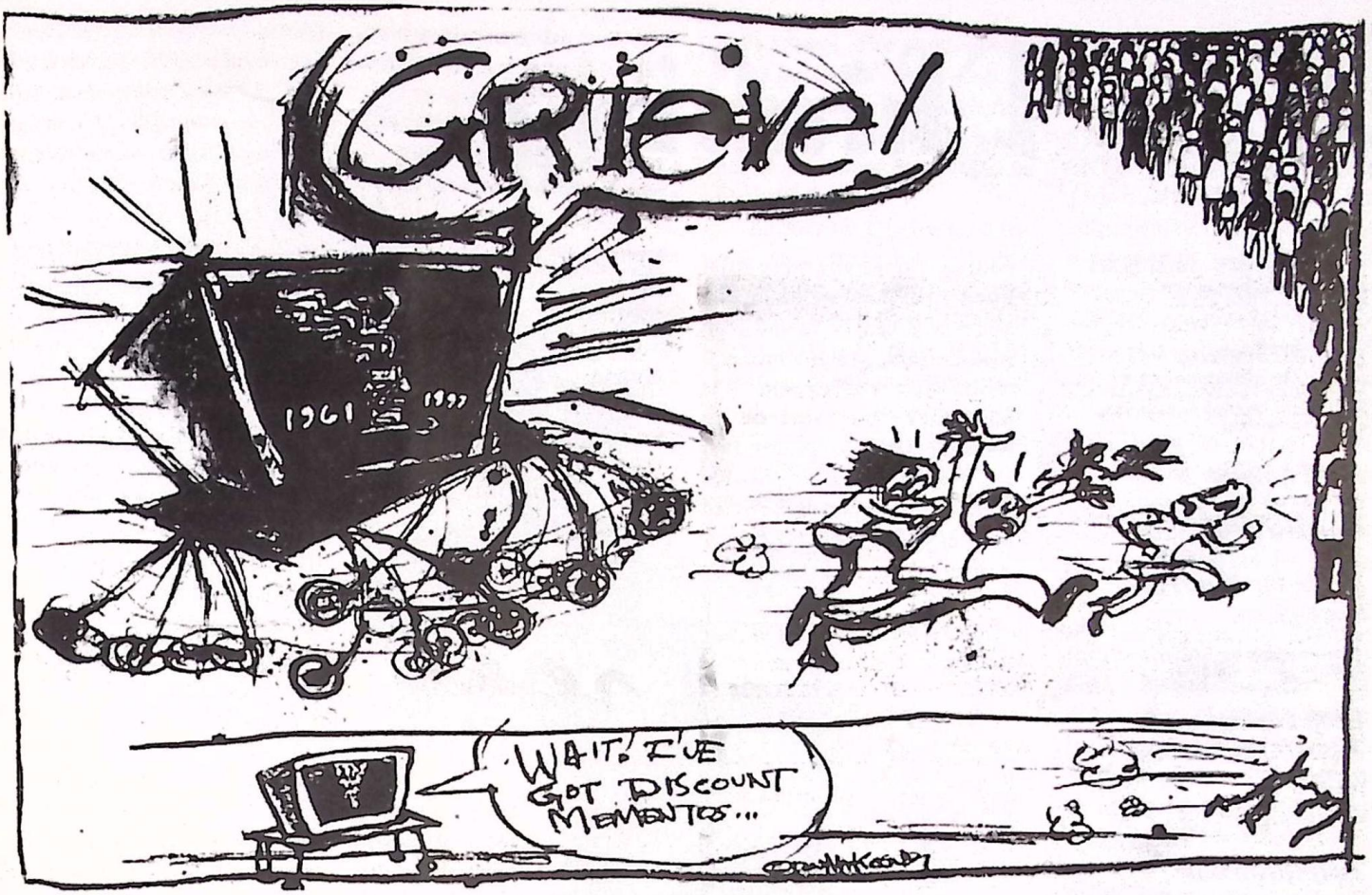
Salud.

RM

a crab is a crab

Robert Burns c 1780


HRH
o'lordling acquaintance ne'er boast~
Nor Duke that ye dined wi'yestreen
a crab-louse is still but a crab~
Tho' Perched on the cunt o'a Queen.



3 little pigs

Once there were three little pigs that lived together in mutual respect and in harmony with their environment. Using materials that were indigenous to the area, they each built a beautiful house. One pig built a house of straw, one a house of sticks, and one a house of dung, clay, and creeper vines shaped into bricks and baked in a small kiln. When they were finished, the pigs were satisfied with their work and settled back to live in peace and self-determination. But their idyll was soon shattered.

One day, along came a big bad wolf with expansionist ideas. He saw the pigs and grew very hungry, in both a physical and an ideological sense. When the pigs saw the wolf, they ran into the house of straw. The wolf ran up to the house and banged on the door, shouting, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!" The pigs shouted back, "Your gunboat tactics hold no fear for pigs defending their homes and culture." But the wolf wasn't to be denied what he thought was his manifest destiny. So he huffed and puffed and blew down the house of straw.

The frightened pigs ran to the house of sticks, with the wolf in hot pursuit. Where the house of straw had stood, other wolves bought up the land and started a banana plantation. At the house of sticks, the wolf again banged on the door and shouted, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!" The pigs shouted back, "Go to hell, you carnivorous, imperialistic oppressor!" At this, the wolf chuckled condescendingly. He thought to himself: "They are so childlike in their ways. It will be a shame to see them go, but progress cannot be stopped." So the wolf huffed and puffed and blew down the house of sticks.

The pigs ran to the house of bricks, with the wolf close at their heels. Where the house of sticks had stood, other wolves built a time-share condo resort complex for vacationing wolves, with each unit a fibreglass reconstruction of the house of sticks, as well as native curio shops, snorkelling, and dolphin shows.

At the house of bricks, the wolf again banged on the door and shouted, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!" This time in response, the pigs sang songs of solidarity and wrote letters of protest to the United Nations. By now, the wolf was getting angry at the pigs' refusal to see the situation from the carnivore's point of view. So he huffed and puffed, and huffed and puffed, then grabbed his chest and fell over dead from a massive heart attack brought on from eating too many fatty foods.

The three little pigs rejoiced that justice had triumphed and did a little dance around the corpse of the wolf. Their next step was to liberate their homeland. They gathered together a band of other pigs who had been forced off their lands. This new brigade of porcinistas attacked the resort complex with machine guns and rocket launchers and slaughtered the cruel wolf oppressors, sending a clear signal to the rest of the hemisphere not to meddle in their internal affairs. Then the pigs set up a model democracy with free education, universal health care, and decent housing for everyone.

Please note; the wolf in this story was a metaphorical construct, no actual wolves were harmed in the writing of the story. 2A

Do-Thinking

***Timber Wars.* Judi Bari**
Common Courage Press 1994
ISBN 1 56751 0 26 4. £12.95

SchNEWSround
Justice? 1997. ISBN 0 9529748 0 0. £4.99
(from: SchNEWS c/o On the Fiddle PO Box 2600 Brighton BN2 2DX England– send stamp for newsletter)

Road Raging
Road Alert! 1997. £3
(from: Road Alert! PO Box 5544, Newbury, Berks RG14 5FB England)

***Battle for the Trees.* Merrick**
1997. ISBN 0 9529975 0 9. £3
(from; Godhaven Ink, PO Box HP94, Godhaven, Leeds LS6 1YJ)

***Deep Ecology and Anarchism.* Various authors**
Freedom Press 1993
ISBN 0 900384 67 0. £2.50

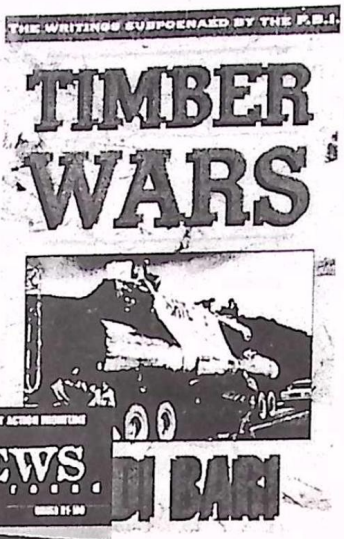
***Anarchism and Environmental Survival.* Graham Purchase**
See Sharp Press 1997
ISBN 0 961 3289 8 3. £8.95

All available from AK Distribution, PO Box 12766 Edinburgh EH8 9YE (Tel.0131 555 5165 E-mail ak@akedin.demon.co.uk) unless shown

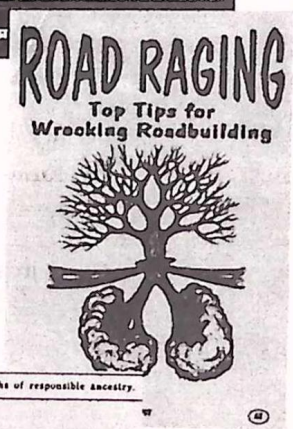
There is a vast range of radical green literature. For the most part, it falls into two categories – practical handbooks/accounts, and theory/ideas. The world seems to be split unfortunately into doers and thinkers, and never the twain shall meet.

Thoughtful and practical books like Judi Bari's *Timber Wars* are few and far between. Though dated by events since the book was produced in 1994, it remains an invaluable detailed example of the kind of tactics the state will use when confronted with well-organised direct action backed up by mass popular support. Dirty Tricks.

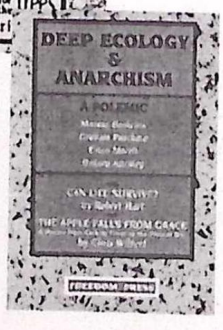
The organisation and alliance formed between Earth First! and the timber workers was a breakthrough. This, of course, raises the perennial question of how environmental awareness can be raised with road-building, automobile and oil industry workers, etc. It is necessary for society to fundamentally change direction and this is obviously impossible without the support of the broad mass of workers and producers. Bari provides an account of a bold experiment towards that end.



This is not the only example of the environmental movement breaking out of single issues and into political ideas and practices which might make a REAL difference. If you want a weekly chuckle and commentary on environmental direct actions, try *SchNEWS*, available in free newsheet or compilation book form from Brighton based Justice?



Road Alert! bring us *Road Raging*, which is a chunky volume (200pp) amply summed up by its subtitle - 'top tips for wrecking roadbuilding'. Written in clear, accessible style (I couldn't find any unexplained jargon) it provides a top read on tactics for the beginner.



This is a seriously useful reference handbook, and I've never seen anything like it. On cursory inspection everything seems to be covered – building campaigns and links through dealing with media (and the "enemy") to legal issues is all there, albeit in varying detail. Add to this the central topics of direct action tactics, planning and methods. Also of note; an engaging and really quite sensitive section on maintaining the 'campaign community'. It not only mentions physical ailments and mental stress of communal camps, but also touches importantly on the sad facts of social hierarchy and implicit sexism derived from the 'machismo' of direct action.

The growing realisation that, despite its breadth and chunkiness, there isn't going to be any kind of reason presented for 'wrecking roadbuilding' beyond an implicit assumption that it is wrong, starts to creep up on you. As such, it falls straight into the green trap – we know we don't like the road idea and want to stop it, but even if we are successful (this time), where does that leave us? What's the plan? Building a wider political movement is the most difficult task, and it is so often left out as a result presumably in the interests of the short-term campaign.

Still, knocking a book for not including material it never set out to include is the easiest way to duck the real review. I've read most of Road Raging as a 'dip in' reference, and it worked for me.

If you prefer the travelogue approach, try *Battle for the Trees*, a personal account of a participant at Newbury. The extended diary type format is not particularly my cup of pennyroyal tea, but I've long been berated for lack of imagination. I like nice hard facts in as few words as possible. Still, it's readable even for me, and will appeal to you if you're looking to immerse yourself in the lifestyle and 'get spiritual' with the trees.

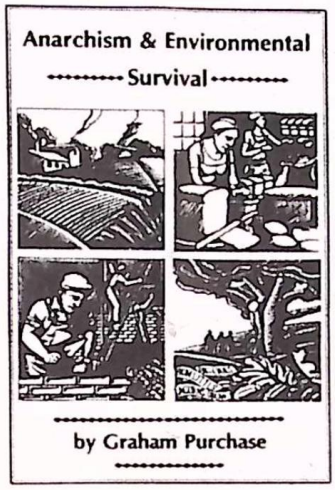
There's good peripheral information on commentary on Newbury from outside the camp but, again, a pretty total lack of analysis of how Newbury is going to lead to the replacement of the system promoting it.

Stopping the roads and saving the trees is as far as it looks, and that will never be enough to make the big change from exploitative oppression to mutual aid. A local campaign group to me is trying to get a bypass put back into the roads programme to take traffic and fumes away from their kids and communities. Even more short-sighted – but a symptom of the lack of politics behind the roads protests. Still, I much prefer action with no real strategy to strategy with no real action, but then I'm just an old romantic revolutionary who's getting impatient. Where is the combination?

Which brings us to the intellectual heavyweight end of the spectrum. And they don't come much heavier than Murray Bookchin. The fact I have been given none of Bookchin's books to review is fortunate for both of us, I can assure you. However, it does rather beg the question of why he has sprung up in this paragraph.

Well in fact, he has written (or should I say spat out) a piece in *Deep Ecology and Anarchism.* This is a poor text in that Bookchin is so obviously given the last word, commenting with hindsight on the other main contributors. The only area where Bookchin deserves any credit is in his endorsement of Morris' excellent dismantling job on the mystic neo-religion that is deep ecology. It both pains me to think that I was once a Naess convert and comforts me that at least now I have more sense. The book is worth it to read Morris' piece, but don't waste your time on Bookchin's confused ranting.

Other contributors include Hart, Aitchley, Wilbert and Purchase. Aitchley trots out the emotional but seriously dubious ideas of deep ecology – as I have been through that particular loop, I'll dwell no further. If you want a brief and positive introduction, Aitchley gives it.



Hart and Wilbert write competently about our modern environmental ills, but this sort of stuff has been around for decades – I couldn't help repeatedly yelling YES, AND WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT NOW? (inwardly of course – I think of the neighbours).

Purchase seems to want to develop some ideas in this direction. However, he is too intent on a sustained attack on Bookchin's fall from reasonable clarity about 25 years ago to current confused arrogance. This tone drew me immediately to Purchase! The commentary spans Bookchin's career, and is a useful summary. Though shot through with personal jibes, it is not as vehement or childish as Bookchin's reply.

Luckily for Purchase, I have also to review his polemic *Anarchism and Environmental Survival,* which, like a breath of fresh air, takes a more practical approach to outlining a potential future society and how to get there. Purchases ideas deserve more exposure. He has been developing the concept of 'bioregions' for years and has been publishing these mostly in the form of cheap pamphlets (also available from AK). While I am not yet a fully paid up bioregions fanatic, Purchase gets you thinking constructively, rather than confusedly or not at all, as the majority of writers on 'green' forms of anarchism. OK, lets cut to the chase. It's a happy coincidence that both *DA* and Purchase seem to converge on the observation that anarcho-syndicalism, contrary to self-interested critics, does combine social, political and economic issues in both community and workplace – it always has done, it did in the Spanish Civil War (through the CNT-IWA), and it always will do. The basic observation that community members are workers too, have (or should have) environmental concerns, and are producers as well as consumers, seems to repeatedly escape the attention of writers of alternative ideas and it is refreshing to see Purchase elucidating more integrated conceptions.

I was left with the feeling that there is a lot more to be done along this line of thought, particularly in developing a future vision of society. But then, if he had dotted the *i*'s and crossed the *t*'s I would have been berating him for presupposing the future too far before we get there (a point he himself makes). A must read book if ever there was one. Expensive at £9, but then rare gems are.

PS. It is sad that our thinkers are too scared of (or depressed by?) their thoughts to put them into any sort of co-ordinated strategic action. Their mental efforts rot in books. It is even sadder that our doers are too busy doing to think politically and strategically (or too scared they will become sterile thinkers?) Their campaigns die in the all-engulfing welcoming arms of capitalism. After all that thinking, I'm off to Dover to tackle the fascists. DA

Conference: "Ninety Years of Progress"

Organised by the Galton Institute, London, September 1997

Eugenics since the Second World War has had a bad press. The Nazi atrocities severely damaged the intellectual and moral respectability of eugenics societies and ideas. Now, with the recent developments in genetic engineering, the eugenicists feel that there is once again an audience which will be receptive to some ideas held dear to the 'science'.

In September 1997 the Galton Institute held a two day conference which was addressed by a number of distinguished speakers, most of whom were not eminent eugenicists or even particularly enthusiastic about eugenics itself. In order to understand what eugenics was/is about, we need to comment on what originally inspired it. What later emerged as 'eugenics', in its founder Francis Galton's words (1883), was based on the 'science' of improving human stock by giving "the suitable race or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable". However, in reality, the project became in Anglo-Saxon countries one of the sterilisation of the 'unfit' and the promotion of birth control for the working class. Despite the introduction of a selective breeding programme for the Nazi SS, in many countries the main impact of eugenicists' views was on policy recommendations to governments affecting social policy, welfare and public health.

Eugenics, while being capable of being interpreted in a left wing way, has normally been used as a means for blaming the victim, and for seeking biological explanations instead of seeking social solutions to humanity's problems. The September conference, despite carrying the 'title of ninety years of progress', in fact showed very little progress (unless we count developments in genetics). What was interesting, though, was to note that the self same ideas still have resonance and support in some areas. DA

Gandalf & after

Green Anarchist
No.49/50 Autumn '97 £1 Free to Prisoners.
BM 1715 London WC1N 3XX

ALF Supporters Group Newsletter
Late Summer 1997 £1.50
BCM 1160 London WC1N 3XX

I am supposed to be briefly reviewing these two organs. However, the conviction of three Green Anarchist editors for three years on the basis that they incited terrorism is pretty devastating (GAndALF – trial of GA and ALF Supporters Group papers). This seems rather more important to me right now than what these periodicals actually contribute towards building a real movement for the replacement of capitalism. Now, anyone can apparently be convicted for sitting in big armchairs bragging about how brave they are – or come to that, for agreeing about or writing about 'criminal' activity, rather than actually doing it (or, more commonly, for being framed up for it). This is indeed a new departure, even for our current warped judicial system. Anyone with a still-lingering feeling that freedoms of expression are protected by UN Human Rights Charters better think again – conspiracy and incitement laws in Britain see to it that they are ignored.

The prosecution seemed to concentrate on the reporting of events. To burn, smash, send bombs and generally cause mayhem and public outrage is no longer necessary. Interestingly, the editor of the ALF newsletter was acquitted of it all.

So what is all the fuss about? The prosecution appears to be about silencing the reporting of direct actions. Incidentally, since I am supposed to be reviewing here, both papers are predominantly about listing direct actions of various types – the sort that doesn't reach the media generally for obvious reasons (namely it might seem like a good idea to a few other people than those who are already doing it). Starting with these and getting example-setting sentences seems to be part of a strategy to scare the shit out of editors of direct action type organs everywhere, and generally to shut them up for fear of a dose of the same medicine. It seems to be a strategy bound for serious problems. Firstly, anyone writing about direct action is unlikely to be put off by such threats from the various Special Branch/Scotland Yardy groups who seem to be sniffing around every corner more than ever these days. Secondly, in most likely cases any publicity is likely to be good for defendants (GA claim masses more contacts than ever due to the Gandalf Trial).

Which brings me back to the mags. ALF Newsletter is, in the main, pretty straightforward. It reports animal rights actions and provides contacts and news on animal rights prisoners and trials. The remainder has comments and little in terms of analysis. For those still energetically trashing local butchers windows, without noticing the trade they are diverting to massive supermarkets with secure butchers inside, and each with massive holdings in some of the worst animal factories of the lot, it does all seem a bit sad. On the other hand, the shear number of individual acts to support animals, often by inconspicuous and unconnected people, is overwhelming – and has contributed massively to a sea change in societal habits and attitudes regarding so many areas of animal exploitation. It has led to vegetarianism on a massive scale. But the contradictions and shortsightedness in AR activist thought seems to translate into similar shortcomings in results. Naomi Campbell is back on the fur catwalk again. Will people listen to shallow arguments the next time around? (Not that 'Fur is wrong', but that it is almost the only thing that is wrong). ALF Newsletter seems split between the neo-religious animal zealots with hatred for evryone who is impure towards animals (which is everyone who isn't already dead – think about it, we live on what could be their playgrounds), to those who are looking for a way to build a cohesive long term strategy to replace capitalism with a system based on direct democracy and freedom from needless suffering and exploitation (us and animals and plants and life generally). Now we're talking.

If you know what GA stands for after reading it then you made more sense of it than I did. Any plan which seems centred on the 'Third World' land workers taking back their land is problematic for me. Couple it with a vague plan to network in autonomous small groups, ending with taking back the land and converting it into small allotments with no quarrelling – oh, and 're-establishing our relationship with the earth' (of course), and it gets stranger.

Boycotting and attacking capitalist institutions is undoubtedly of potential use depending on the situation, and 'creating a culture of resistance'? - Well, I couldn't agree more. But all that gardening is likely to leave most urban dwellers cold. What is Mrs X with 2.3 kids to do then? What happens now? Do I leave my semi (I won't be able to manage the mortgage if I leave the supermarket job) and take to the woods? Surely if everyone in my town does that the woods will be a hell of a mess? It leaves me confused about the direction, and sceptical about anything that might otherwise have seemed more positive.

Apart from this, the paper is generally readable with occasional insights (Gandalf Trial update) and generally reasonably free of green mystic shit. Borrow a copy, or alternatively, help on the editorial collective of Direct Action, you'll be sent down for incitement, and you'll get copies free!

GANDALF support group details; 01474 815 458. Or; GANDALF defendants campaign, PO Box 66, Stevenage, SG1 2TR). Messages of support to; Noel Molland/Steve Booth/Saxon Burchall-Wood, HMP Winchester, Romsey Road, Winchester SO22 5DS.

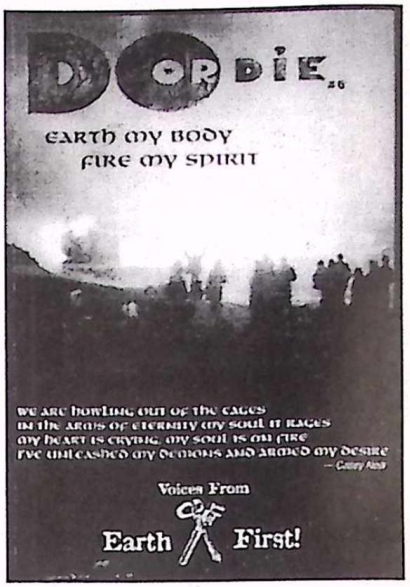
Where there's brass there's muck. Ecology and Anarchism
Anarchist Communist Federation, £1.80
c/o 84b Whitechapel High St London E1 7QX

This short book sets out to show both the links and divisions between anarchism and ecology as well as the arguments that bosses come up with in their attempt to subvert the ecology movement's activities.

Within the obvious limits of a publication of this size (64 pages), this book succeeds in its aims to a surprising degree by making good links between anarchism and ecological movements and criticising the lack of class analysis in the latter. Because of its small size and the speed at which environmental issues are developing, there are some omissions that I would have liked to see such as: consideration of the sexist nature of most population control measures; the human genome project; and the workplace and community as environments.

What is covered however is done well with a range of sources being used and a lot of facts and figures that are useful in formulating arguments and further analysis. This and the general way in which it opens an area for debate and action make this a useful book that is well worth the price. In addition, its call for an analysis and action beyond traditional boundaries is worthy of serious consideration from both movements.

Do or Die



Do or Die
#6, 1997, £3
Do or DTP Collective, c/o South Downs EF!, Prior House, 6 Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY.

Firstly, this is a vast improvement on the earlier offerings of Earth First! 'heavy stuff'. Up on quality, and thankfully much less of the spiritual pagany funny stuff. By and large, this is an excellent read. Articles (or are they essays?) are generally in bite size chunks and can be hacked off bit by bit. The small words make the going hard for the oldies, but presumably this results in less trees biting the dirt in the process. Even then, we are talking some 150 pages of single spaced text. Monocles out and on with it.

Articles typically fall into one of three types – personal accounts of actions, neo-academic or even political comment on the state of the movement, and environmental information. The latter contains well researched and well written stuff, from which I now know that Scotland could be reforested with ease within years, and wolves could be seen once again.

Earth First! is at a crossroads. It arrived some 6 years ago in Britain, it was involved in spawning and developing the Reclaim the Streets movement, and it is libertarian based. It has remained submerged in a wider direct action milieu without falling into a Greenpeace type leadership trap, and is now a part of something much bigger than it would claim responsibility for. It is almost a victim of its own success and many involved are rightly seeking a new direction for growth. The involvement in labour struggles such as the Liverpool Dockers and London Underground is a development that, on the face of it, is dead exciting. It seems that a combination of awareness of the root cause of our collective problems and ability and willingness to do something about them is now within grasp of a potential mass movement.

Back to Do or Die. The first few articles seem to concentrate on where Reclaim the Streets are now, later comes Reclaim the Valleys, and the South Wales opencast actions. There is a healthy cynicism of the wider green movement throughout – and a recognition of the extent to which 'greening business' has successfully co-opted environmentalism at the shallow end. 'The business of conservation, or the conservation of business?' sums up the buying up of the weaker greens through corporate and state sponsorship. Elsewhere of contrasting interest is one of the features of Reclaim the Streets – street theatre. This may seem somewhat 'middle class' or trivial on the face of it, but is clearly developed through connections drawn with the use of subversive street theatre in the Paris, 1968 uprising.

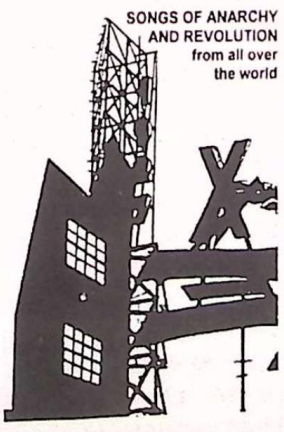
Moving swiftly on through the chunky breadth of issues (which are covered on a pleasing range of levels), genetic engineering also caught my eye. This is a topic which has received nowhere near the exposure it should have, and the account is both lucid and engaging. The personal accounts of actions are less scruffy diary notes than they are almost journalistic in terms of readability. Even I was hooked on accounts of road protesters meeting friendly security guards and getting tip-offs. Shame no formal links or organising amongst guards has happened. After all, these are invariably some of the most down-trodden workers, ex-miners and the like, on temporary contracts. The mutual interests in making the protests last as long as possible seem self evident.

Surveillance also caught my eye. From CCTV ideas (I liked getting the kids to stand in front of them with strategically held balloons, and the inexplicable scenes involving aliens) to a run down of the various Scotland Yard units which have mushroomed recently (that's what happens when kept in the dark and fed on shit). If you would rather avoid the obvious paranoiac overtones don't read one of the last articles, 'The Empire Strikes Back'. Oh, and the Zapatistas even get a mention. What's next, the Spanish Civil War, anarcho-syndicalism and massive political-economic community and workplace organisation? But that's Solidarity Federation..?

And the book? Buy it and read it, lend it and recommend it. Then do it. I'm off to get my second subscription to Action Update, and I've already stopped washing in preparation for my next opencast occupation. See you there.

Songs of Anarchy and Revolution
Sept 1997
Cassette Only
£4 from Norwich Solidarity Centre, Room 13, Muspole Workshops, Muspole St, NR3 1QD. Orders 01603 611072.

The title says it all. And the final track – l'internationale – typifies those preceding it. If you like tingly, uplifting traditional revolutionary songs, this is an ideal compilation. If you find them tired, old and in the way, then forget it. If you insist on CD quality, ditto. These are not the scratchiest tracks I've heard but they haven't had the full digi-remaster either.



You've got to be enthusiastic about the folk-blues tradition of the first half of the century to stick with it throughout in a single listening, but as background it provides suitable revolutionary atmosphere to any small gathering (in my case two and a bottle of Rioja).

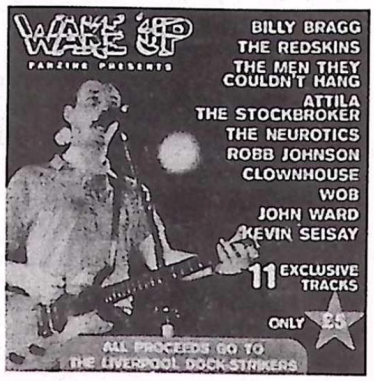
The other major advantage is that the 31 tracks of entertainment appear in various languages. Songs from France, Latin America (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay), North America (Yiddish tracks from Egelstat and 2 Joe Hill (IWW) numbers), Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Italy and, of course, Spain. So if you want to pick up the dubious skill of being able to orate revolutionary songs in a multitude of tongues, then go for it. On the other hand, the lack of translations and songsheets should (hopefully) hold you back. Not surprisingly I couldn't understand much, but the message was usually pretty clear. The level of emotion and feeling is almost fearful.

If you haven't heard these types of songs, it is worth spending your last £4. It won't bring about the revolution but one listening makes it crystal clear how deeply those who have fought in the past really felt. Not for the faint-hearted: mandatory for everyone else.

Wake Up e.p.

Wake Up Fanzine presents Billy Bragg and friends
CD, Wake Up Records 1997, Womble 2 - All proceeds go to the Liverpool Dock Strikers

A re-release of an old (1987) 12" miners benefit e.p. apparently containing rare and sought after recordings. It's now issued on CD with five additional tracks. Wake Up is a fifteen year old fanzine which I haven't read for a long while (hey, I gave up fanzines when they stopped putting flexi discs by unbelievably twee janglepop bands on the cover).



To look at the names on the old e.p. (The Redskins, Billy Bragg, The Neurotics, Kevin Seisay and Attila the Stockbroker) I'd have put it at least fifteen not ten years old. It's all earnest leftie stuff and if you like Billy Bragg and the Redskins, you are home and dry. And Attila the Stockbroker's name still makes me giggle, after all these years.

The newer stuff (well, if you call The Men They Couldn't Hang and Robb Johnson new) is noticeable at first because of the difference in quality of the recordings. TMTCH I have a nostalgic soft spot for and this acoustic version of The Line is fine. Robb Johnson seems to keep popping up on compilations I buy. He has a voice, a guitar and some political lyrics. Wob I missed on the first playing, John Ward I couldn't remember and Clownhouse... err... On a second listen then Men are even better, Robb Johnson's Barricades is a sweet sounding ditty. Wob (I ask you) is semi acoustic warbles and is far to AOR for me, John Ward has more acoustic stuff with a bluesy country feel and is, by far, much better. Clownhouse have a bit of the b**tpop '60's thing, harmonies and all, but less edge.

None of the music here sounds new. Any of it could be from '97, '87 or even '77. It's not offensive and the proceeds are for a good cause (not an excuse for being dull though).

Copies/fanzines: Dave T, 112 Victoria Road, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR33 9LU. £6.00 inc. p+p (+£1 overseas). Cheques to Dave T. Donations to Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee c/o. TGWU, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool L33 8EQ.

Zeros + ones: digital women and the new technoculture

Sadie Plant

Fourth Estate, London, 1997, £14.99

This new book from free floating intellectual Sadie Plant is an alluring one. Not just because of the silver cover, which stands out on any bookseller's shelf, but it runs somewhat deeper. Sadie Plant, author of a text on the situationists as well as plenty of other material, charts the role of women in the construction of technology and society as we know it (or don't). Recovering women from a marginalised position in Western society, Plant weaves her way through multiple stories which blend superb insight, the desire to 'set the record right' regarding women's part played, and a fascinatingly easy to read style. Well worth grabbing and reading at least a few of the trendy titles for each short section which include 'genderquake', 'virtual aliens', 'cyberflesh' and 'mutants'. Get the (not so) S(cience) F(iction), cyber-techno-imagery? Well worth zeroing in on(e).

A Glimpse of Hell

Duncan Forrest (ed.)

Amnesty International,
London Cassel, 1996, 214pp. £12.99

Even a poorly written book can have interesting ideas or confronts us with facts that we would rather ignore. Liberals can do good research, and they are able to ask incisive questions that they cannot answer given their blinkered political stance. However, even revolutionaries (!) find it easy to forget, living in a 'parliamentary democracy', that the state and capitalism rely on force and violence to maintain their dominance. In the Third World, it is brutally obvious that torture is the bulwark of the status quo. In the West we can too easily dismiss the events in Bosnia or what happened in Nazi Germany in the Second World War as exceptions to the rule.

"A Glimpse of Hell" is not an easy read, but it does make us confront difficult issues and poses some of those important questions that it is incapable of answering. However, the rational liberalism of Anmesty International is put to good use in finding the desire to expose abuse, corruption and hypocrisy, and on a practical level, a determination to alleviate suffering. Yes, the system based on torture and sadism must be overthrown, and egalitarian society installed in its place. Liberalism must be transcended and Libertarian Communism embraced. Hopefully, this book may point some of it's readers in that direction.

The Men They Couldn't Hang, The Oyster Band

Manchester University, Saturday 4 October 1997

The Men They Couldn't Hang, blimey! I haven't seen the Men since ten years past (when I was very young). Back when all their songs came from the first two albums, because that's all there was. They've not changed much. Some of the songs still come from the first two albums, though now I assume the intervening years have giving them much more material. I was more than pleased to hear The Ghosts of Cable Street, Ironmasters and especially Scarlet Ribbons, a song which always gets me. Their alternative indie folk thing was always less riotous than the Pogues (taped the Shane McGowan interview on BBC2 the same night, poured the Martini down the sink on Sunday) and always more overtly political. It's a radical rebellious working class politics distinctly socialist in flavour, but not obviously anything other than pro-union, pro-fight back. Their sound now seems more solid and sadly more mature (read a bit duller). Never-the-less I really enjoyed the set, including the much deserved and widely demand encore with Curly Watts guesting on unplugged guitar and face pulling.

I missed the start of The Oyster Band set, oh well the bar called. More folk than the Men, with fiddle and accordion and all. Fiddly rock folk is fine and fun when it's all bouncy and up tempo, when it's not, in the case of the Oysters, it goes all stadium - ugh! Take it away. The Oyster Band have been around a while, and their audience definitely has. It makes a change for me to be noticeably younger than a large part of the crowd at the gig nowadays. The Oyster Band also apparently have a political edge. I vaguely remember seeing them at a benefit some years ago, either anti-apartheid or anti-fascist, it was a vague night. Anyway, one particular bit caught my attention tonight.

"There will always be a happy hour,
For those with money, jobs and power,
And they never seem to realise the hurt,
They cause to those they treat like dirt."

Apologies if its not completely accurate, but its by memory, and thats beginning to fail me. The Oyster Band managed to show both why I am in principal an avid anti-folkie (especially folk rock) and in practice find it a bit of fun. Whereas the Men They Couldn't Hang are even more worrying, I genuinely like them.

Albanian spring

A view from Greece

It seems that upon the relics of the pseudosocialist regimes, no flower has bloomed. However, Albania's free-market exercise had its unpredictable moments..

As soon as things started looking uncomfortable for the New World Order in the Balkans, the liberal mass media were quick to reuse formulas they had learnt from the Gulf War days. One of their aims was to present even the war in former Yugoslavia as a local inter-ethnic conflict, rather than an affair with many characteristics of a world war: multiple diplomatic involvement, foreign army presence, interstate arms trade and expanding immigration being the most obvious ones. Another effort has been to portray the imposed political changes and the free market strategies throughout the Balkans as inevitable, or even welcome.

The adaptation of former Eastern bloc countries into the global economy is, according to the economic sections of the papers, a "one-way street". Rising unemployment rates and falling life expectancy in most Balkan countries are considered "social ills". Sudden poverty and intensified oppression are seen as the "necessary evils" of the transition to the free market. The invasion of tax-free investors are "shock therapies", and so is the rapid privatisation of health and education services, all ultimately blessed by the "realism" of the indexes of economic development.

One of the latest experiments in free-market capitalism in the region is Albania, officially the (chronically) poorest country in Europe, despite its vast natural resources. Its annual per capita income is US$369, (US$1200 in Tirana, which indicates the greatly uneven distribution of income between cities and countryside). In some areas, unemployment has reached 100%. The "unofficial" heroin, opium, arms and oil trades are thriving, as are cholera, hepatitis and salmonella. "Poor Albanians, how will they cope with all that legacy of corruption?", was the humanist concern in the foreign reportage columns and documentaries of their more well-off, uncorrupted neighbours until the end of last year. They would soon get an answer.

sudden poverty and intensified oppression are seen as the "necessary evils" of the transition to the free market

Greek mini-imperialism

Greek capital, one of Western capitalism's best students in SE Europe, rose to the challenge of near-virgin marketplaces and sagging economic structures. It has become a dynamic investor in the Balkans, and the second largest in Albania after Italy. 160 Greek businesses had opened in Albania by last March, investing over US$120m. Besides financial intervention, Greece has gained an effective political and cultural presence in Albania on the basis of the Greek minority in the South, and most crucially, a steady and relatively controlled influx of economically as well as politically useful immigrant workers.

The country's involvement in Albania has been equal parts brutal invasion and soft touch. Greece has used both the assassins of the nationalist Front for the Liberation of Northern Epeirus (MABH), and the country's charitable businessmen. Both the "right-wing" and the current "socialist" government have unanimously agreed on the three-step approach that has been followed over the last few years. First, there was the fierce jingoistic rhetoric about the "suffering Greek brothers in Albania", which encouraged the minority organisations in the South to co-operate in the second phase. Development projects and political agreements with the Greek minority population came next, proving how common financial interests can be successfully combined with nationalist ones on both sides of the border.

However, when Albanian refugees started flooding Greece in numbers greater than the internal market was counting on for a mild economic boost, its stance changed. In the third phase of Greco-Albanian relations, the apparent generosity gave way to reluctance, fear and finally the expulsion of a large number of immigrants. In the parliamentary debates on granting green cards to refugees, (thus legalising them, officialising their presence and controlling their numbers), the prominent objection was that this would result in the further desertion of Greek villages in Albania.

The newcomers, "flexible" workers under the inflexible laws of capital, have several roles to play. They are reduced to macroeconomic statistics, disciplined as "clandestine fugitives", blown up into media images of horror and dread for the rest of the citizens, and often finished off as mere logistic casualties.

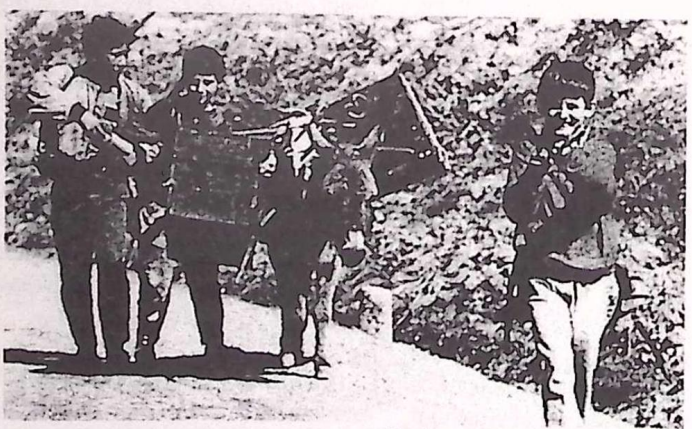
clumsy capitalism

Immigrants from Albania are now estimated to be around a quarter million. This is about half the total number of Albanian refugees. While providing slave-wage labour for the host countries, they are vital for the Albanian economy, too. Reports from early 1997 estimated that since 1991, when Berisha's

Democratic Party gained power and opened the borders (which had been sealed since World War II), immigrants have been sending back around US$380m a year. That is more than a quarter of Albania's total national income.

Most of this money was (and partly still is) distributed through illegal banking. In December 1996, the Gross National Product was 2.4 billion dollars, and more than 1 billion dollars had been invested in companies promising rapid profit. Companies such as Xheferri and Popputi presented themselves as charity organisations, Vefa and Kamberi as investment companies, Sudja and Gjalika as private enterprises. These bankers all claimed they invested in hotels, land, supermarkets, football teams and started off by giving 6-8% interest in the by now well-known pyramid pattern, where one pays an immediately predecessing investor and expects to get their money back through the immediately following one. Those who are higher up in the pyramid cannot be touched. The Central Bank of Albania allowed the functioning of "holding companies" and, when not fully involved in it, turned a blind eye to the flourishing banking system. Apart from capital made in Greek and Italian construction sites, farms, kitchens, and street-corners, the wealthiest banks, like Vefa, were supported by arms, drugs and tobacco deals struck in Kosovo, Tetovo and Greece.

Relying on the rumours that the first few hundreds of investors had made some profit, more than a million Albanians were living off the interest of 100-200 dollars a month given by the banks. Then, in November 1996, the World Monetary Fund issued a report warning the Albanians they'd been had.



Donkey transporting amunition

within a week all police stations, military warehouses and arms industries had been torched and plundered

The banks responded to the attack with 20% and 35% interest rates. Perceptive native businessmen and politicians immediately withdrew their relatively humble dollar and gold accounts and boarded jets to the West. A few bank-owners were sent to prison. Most people were still somehow expecting to get their savings back. Those who tried to speak up, amongst them students in Girokaster who went on a hunger strike, were beaten up and tortured. By February '97 most banks had collapsed.

In any other European country it takes a maximum of six months to expose a pyramid banking fraud - Italy and the Ukraine are recent examples. In Albania it took more that two years. Having placed high hopes for democracy and prosperity on the post-Enver Hoxha era of Berisha, the Albanians learnt the lesson of capital accumulation the hard way. The next thing the "foreign observers" would see was the accumulation of about four million Kalashnikovs, machine guns, revolvers and Chinese TTs in the hands of non-licensed citizens.

a hot March...

How did it come to this? Interestingly, no organised mass violent attacks took place. On the first of March, a police station with a hundred fully armed policemen in Saranda failed to get effective orders from the Ministry of Public Order in Tirana and practically surrendered to a few people throwing stones. A navy base in the same town followed. Within a week all police stations, military warehouses and arms industries had been torched and plundered. Overnight, shooting became South Albania's national hobby.

Then the looting started, and the indescriminate attacks on public and private property. Fruit processing factories, textile factories, banks, courts, petrol stations, rows of residential buildings were destroyed and abandoned. The unifying battle-cry of all the small bands of armed citizens blocking the roads and pathways with tanks, jeeps and tree-trunks in Avlona, Fieri, Girokaster, Lushnia, Tepeleni, Saranda, Emalie..., everywhere, was: "Down with Berisha. We want our money back".

In the meantime, Popular Salvation Committees were beginning to organise the defence and food supplies of rebel regions and demanding all due economic compensations, the formation of a multi-party government, elections, a new constitution, and a change in the electoral law.

After days of negotations, on the 6th of March the official opposition reached an agreement with a terrified Berisha government and on the 9th a temporary coalition government was formed, with view to elections in June. No mention of the people getting their money back. The Avlona committee made clear they were not negotiating with the government unless there was specific talk about compensation. The rebels in Girokaster called for the formation of popular councils in every town and village.

In the next days, the guerrilla groups of the Democratic Party from the North, the SHIK, the armed units of the Ministry of the Interior, and the anti-terrorist Zabist groups, fought the armed citizens on various occasions in the battle fronts of Mlisan, Balsi, Klitsova, S. Elbasan, which formed a war zone to the south of Tirana. On Thursday 13 March, in the impressive absense of any notion of army or police power, the state mechanism, controlled by the Berisha government, its officials and the SHIK, was confined to a few square miles in the centre of the capital. For about 20 hours, the power situation seemed as fluid as ever.

...in a cold winter

Eager TV viewers across the world enjoyed the background music of kalashnikovs for a while. They got a kick out of paranoid timewarp images of stolen Mercedes giving way to ox carriages right in the centre of Tirana, or of old peasant women in black head-dress with a mobile phone in one hand, and a Kalash in the other.

Shortly after the provisional government was installed and elections announced, the same consumers of news bulletins were annoyed by the disorderly groups throughout Albania and their looting. Puzzled by accounts of Albanian soldiers and policemen shedding their uniforms and refusing to open fire, most were relieved to see the (mainly) French, Italian and Greek "peace squadrons", 8,000 troops in all, landing in Albania.

What they never bothered asking themselves was who was looting whom and why. And they were definitely avoiding terms like "reappropriation" or "redistribution of wealth". Terms like "the desperate uprising of the small investors" definitely sounded more appropriately post-modern and played down any implications of social radicalism. The existence of "mafias" was emphasised. The *Waif Street Journal* of 5 March 1997, for instance, compared the revolt to the Los Angeles riots and tried to sell the theory that the former communists and the mafia were behind the whole thing.

Looting a hotel in Saranda

On the move

However, no Stalinist nostalgia stained the Albanian repertoire of liberation. And it is hard to conceal the fact that there has only ever been one organised mafia behind the black economy and social terrorism in Albania: the State and its Secret Services. Whether the lazy conspiracy theorists liked it or not, the struggle was fought by all kinds of oppressed men and women: peasants, industrial and office workers, elderly people, the unemployed, the students.

The Western governments are interested in stability at the moment. Indeed, the Albanian crisis could potentially block the flow of serious economic and political capital, so they sought to contain it, nip it in the bud before it could, say, spill over across the border and into the Albanian communities of Kosovo. They made no big fuss about picking their Albanian "negotiators". The "surprisingly civilised" conduct of voters and the results of the last general elections satisfied the most engaged of the foreign powers, such as Italy, Austria, the U.S. and Greece (and also Britain and Germany). From now on, safer methods of integration into the free market culture will be used. The coalition government lead by Fatos Nano's Socialist Party, within which, naturally, the experienced former Stalinist bureaucrats enjoy a prominent presence alongside some freshly elected monarchists, seems to be serving these purposes well.

In the Albanian revolt, Greek capital, next to Italian, recognised a great chance to enhance its position in the war, an undeclared but nevertheless bloody war over the conquest of the Balkans. A loan of over 20 billion drachmas (over £40m) was granted and a 600-man "military aid" was sent off as soon as things got out of hand. All the Greeks want in return is a few permanent posts for their political and military consultants, less obstacles to profitability for business enterprises, more control over imported manpower, and the recognition that they're (at least half) the boss around there.

international solidarity waits another day

More than 2000 people lost their lives in the events of the Albanian spirong and early summer. Now, in a different guise, we see the rebels again, fleeing from the police, waiting silently at stations, shot down "for insignificant reasons", scrubbing the dustbins of waged labour with their bare hands. But what has happened to the dignity they earned with their revolt?

there has only ever been one organised mafia.. in Albania: the State and its Secret Services

The forces of state, capital and parties have already given their answer. Their interest first and foremost is always to distort and deactivate facts and values that point towards a different social organisation. They realise that to actively accept and support such values means to actively challenge their own power. Patronising anti-racist verbalism is trying to control the crime-rate and prevent it from spoiling the touristic profile of Greece. Immigration laws seem to be loosening, state and corporate funded research projects are on a mission to build a "new multiculturalist society".

But the immigrant poor of Albania cannot benefit from the gaze of consumers of rebel broadcasts or liberal "rehabilitation" programmes. Guilty charity and humanist rhetoric is hardly any help to them. What they need is what we all need. It is the creation and development of the true values and principles of solidarity in both our organised collective action and our everyday life.

As with the various conflicts in the Balkans, at the news of the Albanian revolt, social resistance in the neighbouring countries was worryingly limited to a few protests in Italian and Greek cities against sending troops to Albania. The issues raised by this failure point to two major tasks. First, we must try to understand the global and local meaning of the Albanian revolt. As much as this involves resisting any self-gratifying mythologies about popular revolutions, wild proletarian riots, or insignificant civil unrest, it involves recognising those rarely beautiful instances where the revolt revealed a spontaneous, collective, headless and class-conscious character, as well as where it exposed the weak points of state and capitalist power within the changing scenery in the Balkans.

Our other duty is not to lose sight of what's happening right next to us. Solidarity, in the sense of both self-respect and mutual support, far from being a neoliberal "approach technique" aimed at appropriating the "Other" across the border, is the most powerful weapon of self-defence and can potentially define the values of the whole of society. The "others" are us - we are the foreigners in the bosses' countries. Only by developing those structures that will transcend national boundaries of struggle, produce informed international solidarity and allow collective resistance to immigration laws and to discrimination against immigrants within and beyond the workplace, can we conceive of a dignified life for all.

For if, by arming their despair, Albanians made a brave step towards human dignity, by arming our conscience, we can make a victorious one.

The Role of Women?
Watch out for the Albanian update coming in a future DA, which will look in detail at the role of women.

Holiday smog

In September I was in Thailand visiting old friends. September is normally the wet season, and I expected rain.

Needless to say I wasn't there for a tan, but it is still hot. My friends live in Surat Thani, in the south. Since their father died in a motorbike accident 12 years ago, when the youngest daughter was 6, life hasn't been easy. The whole family worked, and there was still never enough to send the kids to school full-time. Mrs Suntohnpong has three children and the eldest are now in their twenties. The youngest, Oie, is now married to Noodle.

The first week was wet and dry, but clear sky was the norm. Corruption trials against Prime Minister Chavalit were a topic of conversation – there is far more news around now compared to a few years ago. The second week it suddenly became overcast and grey – due to the fires in Summatra and Kalimantan. From 22nd September onwards, the sky had an acrid tinge to it. Health warnings were issued, motorists had to use headlights, fishing trawlers couldn't go out, all the schools were closed, and the airports lack of sophisticated guidance equipment meant all planes were grounded throughout most of SE Asia. The number of people needing treatment for respiratory illnesses rose dramatically. South Thailand is 800km from Summatra, but runny noses, nostril infections, irritated eyes, and breathing difficulties affected practically everyone. The source was oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, carbon monoxide and ozone – the combustion products of forest fires.

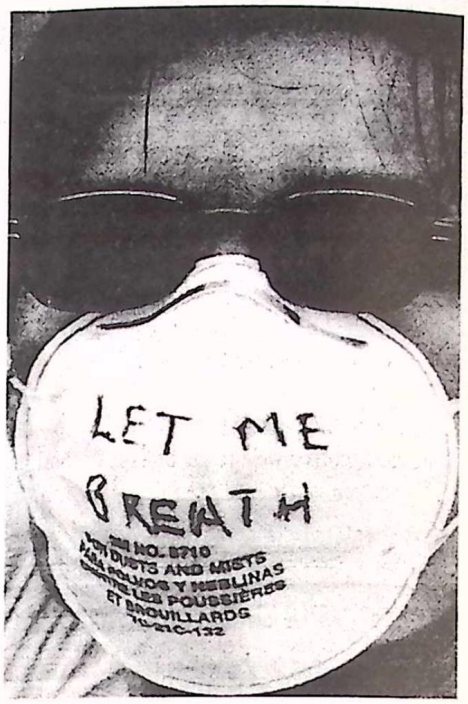
In Indonesia, some 1.5 million acres of forest had been set alight deliberately by timber and plantation owners. At the same time, in Amazonia, Brazil, 10,000 square miles of rainforest was alight, started by loggers and cattle ranchers. The US National Space Research satellite confirmed the cause and the perpetrators.

This is the result of 'profit at any price' development. Such fires in the past have been blamed on 'slash and burn' methods adopted by isolated tribes, but there is a vast difference between this and the catastrophic effects when these practices are adopted by vast logging companies. It is like the difference between fishing for oneself or fishing for maximum profit. Forestry companies, which usually have licenses to exploit 200,000 hectares are now resorting to burning the forest after they have cut and collected the most valuable trees – they can then negotiate a replacement (new) contract on new forest. This year, thanks to satellite images from Uncle Sam, the finger is pointed at the logging companies for starting the fires.

Brazil is Britain's largest supplier of tropical timber, delivering 8.6 million ft³ in 1996 alone. This is because most logging in Brazil goes unchecked by the Brazil Environment Agency, since Parliament has blocked enforcement legislation. In Indonesia, where the haze turned day into night, similar blind eyes are turned to profiteers – some of those turning them stand to gain personally from logging interests.

Meanwhile, over 50,000 people have sought medical treatment and thousands will die prematurely of related illnesses – chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and lung and cardio-vascular disease. In New Guinea, where relief planes could not land because of the smoke, the death toll from famine and disease climbed to 271 during the crisis alone.

These days, remote newsflashes come and go. But the rumbles of thunder will continue to reverberate. For siblings of Oie's generation, long term poor health will see to that.



There is no real mystery about the massive smog cloud that shrouded SE Asia during the last two weeks of September 1997, only wonder at its extent.
An estimated 1.5 million acres were on fire, joining the numerous peat fires that have been left burning underground for years following similar annual clearances. Satellite photos showed the cloud of haze covering an area the size of Western Europe, disrupting almost every aspect of daily life throughout SE Asia. A plane crash on Sumatra on 26 September and a shipping collision in the Straits of Malacca the following day were attributed to it. According to the Air Pollutant Index used by Malaysian meteorologists - on which a rating of 100-200 is "unhealthy" - Sarawak rated 835. The full impact of the disaster on health, jobs, wildlife and the environment will take years to assess.

Get Direct Action delivered to yourdoor!

Why not do it here and now while you're thinking about it? With a supporter's subscription, you get DA & other stuff from the Solidarity Federation.

I want a supporter's sub (No.s 6-9) and enclose £12 (£6 unwaged) (add £3 for overseas)
Rush me more information about DA and SolFed

Name.....

Address.....

For DA subscriptions, information and/or SolFed course details, return slip to: DA-SF, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR, England

education agitation organisation information

2 new courses coming from SolFed in 1998

History of Ideas

A distance learning course run at the cost of materials only. Based on study units which are interesting enough to be read as short pamphlets. You will be assigned a tutor and have the option to complete the questions and get some feedback.

Skills for Action

A workshop-based course consisting of a series of workshops on topics ranging from writing, the media and printing to contemporary methods of direct action. This is not for listening only - come and pitch in your ideas with like-minded people.

WHO'S SOLIDARITY FEDERATION?

Solidarity Federation is the new solidarity movement. Formed in March 1994, it consists of a federation of groups and individuals across England, Scotland & Wales. The basic foundation of Solidarity Federation is the Local.

Getting down the Local

People are getting together to form Locals – Solidarity Federation groups. Locals put solidarity into practice. In time, each Local will have a premises as a base for solidarity action in the local community.

Locals are organising or getting involved in local campaigns across a wide range of issues – both in the community and in workplaces. Issues are wide-ranging: defending our natural and local environment and health; opposing racism, sexism and homophobia; in fact, anything which defends or contributes to our mutual quality of life.

It all forms part and parcel of the building of a solidarity movement.

Direct Action

Apart from being the name of the Solidarity Federation Quarterly, Direct Action is the tool which Locals use in all their work. At a basic level, this can be simply the spreading of information through leaflets, local bulletins and public meetings to raise awareness and involvement locally.

However, Direct Action is not limited to spreading information. It means a physical presence in defending and promoting a better quality of life. Fundamental to Direct Action is the reality that we can only rely on ourselves to achieve our goals. While we reserve the right to take opportunities to fight for improvements to our quality of life now, the solidarity movement must always remain independent from those we are demanding from.

Solidarity Federation will accept neither leadership, charity, nor guidance from government or business – instead, we must couple our principle of solidarity with the practice of self-reliance.

Networking at work

Solidarity Federation members who work in the same industry form Networks. Their purpose is to promote solidarity amongst workers. Networks also use all the tools of Direct Action at their disposal, to fight for better pay and conditions now.

Networks form the basis of a completely new labour movement, nothing like the Trade Unions, which are weakened by having to abide by ridiculous laws, and by hierarchical power structures and self-interested paid officials. The fundamentally different nature of Networks fits their fundamentally different aim.

Where to?

As Locals and Networks grow, they practise community and workers' self-management. Eventually, industries will be run by producers and consumers. In other words, by workers (in Networks) and people in the wider community (Locals) who want the goods and services they provide. And this is no flight of fancy or text-book dream. As the solidarity movement grows in members and influence, so does the scope for action. Both the Locals and Networks have already established a reputation and are showing real results in membership & effectiveness.

Global Solidarity

Capitalism is international, so we need to be organised globally to oppose it and build a viable alternative. Nationalism and patriotism lead to pointless and false divisions, used as tools to fuel economic and bloody wars. Solidarity Federation opposes these in favour of a movement built on global solidarity.

Solidarity Federation is the British section of the International Workers' Association (IWA), the anarcho-syndicalist international. This gives it essential international solidarity and experience from much larger sections such as the CNT (Spain) and USI (Italy).

Founded in 1922, the IWA has a long history of solidarity in action; by the 2nd World War over 5 million people worldwide were affiliated. A combination of war, fascism, and soviet 'communism' all but destroyed the movement, but after the Spanish CNT re-emerged in the late 70's, the IWA had a new lease of life.

Today, there are sections ranging from a few dozen to thousands of members, and growth is rapid. At the last IWA Congress in Madrid, another 7 new sections were affiliated from South America, Africa, Ireland, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The growth continues.

Getting Involved

A global solidarity movement can only gather strength as many more people who share the same aims get involved. Joining Solidarity Federation offers the possibility of contributing to this growing momentum. It is not like joining a club or a political party – rather, it is an opportunity to channel your efforts for change and, at the same time, benefit yourself from the experience. It might just be worth it.

The Solidarity Federation is an organisation of people who seek to destroy capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit world-wide. The state because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for the classes who control it and their servants; it cannot be used to fight the oppression and exploitation that are the consequences of hierarchy and the source of privilege.

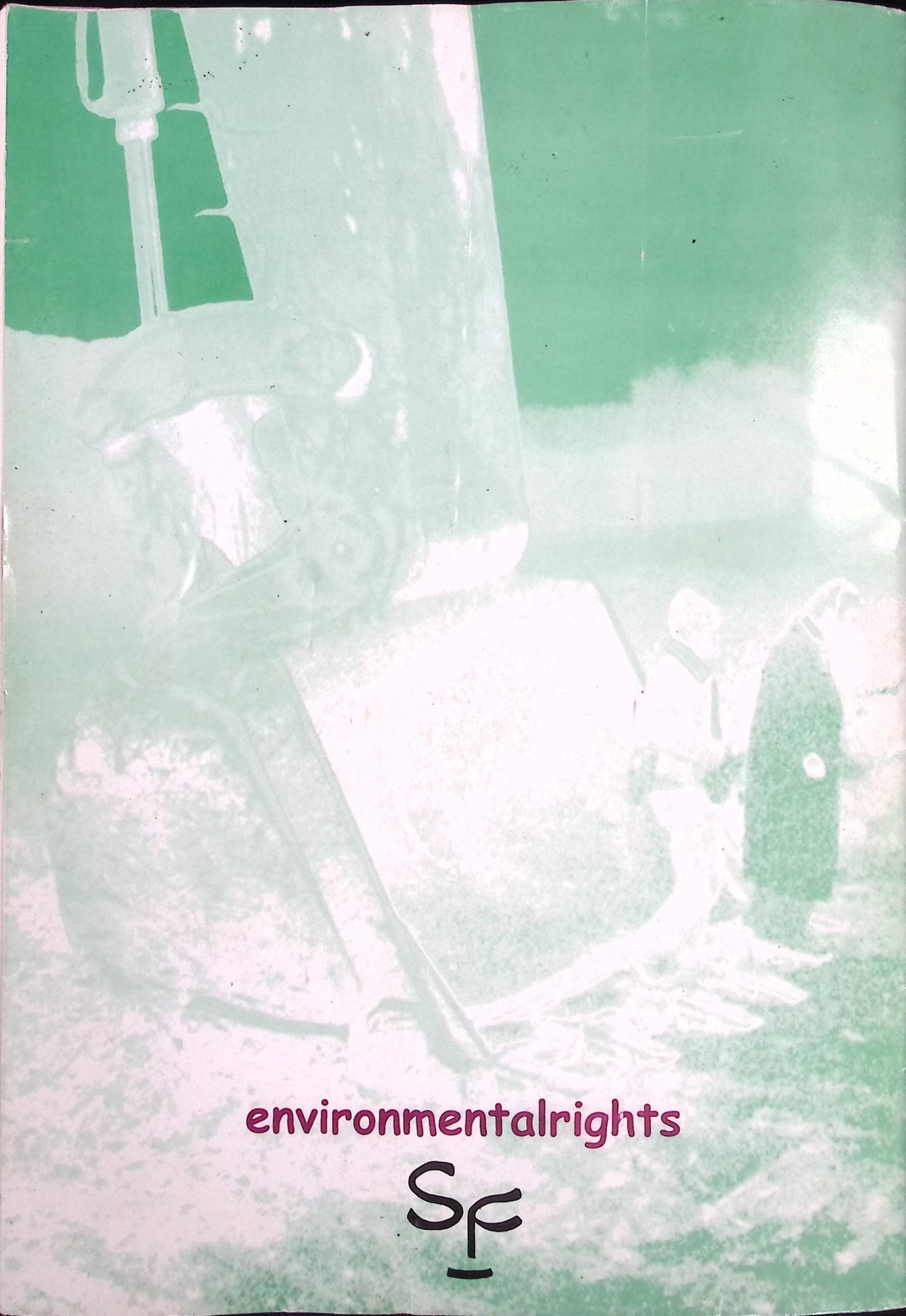
In their place, we want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism.

That society can only be achieved by working class organisations based on similar principles - revolutionary unions. These are not Trade Unions only concerned with "bread and butter" issues like pay and conditions. Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside- which arise from our oppression.

We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful. Unless we organise in this way, politicians - some claiming to be revolutionary - will be able to exploit us for their own ends.

The Solidarity Federation consists of Industrial Networks and Locals which are the nuclei of future revolutionary unions and centres for working class struggle on a local level. Our activities are based on Direct Action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials; our decisions are made through direct participation of the membership.

We welcome all who agree with our aims and principles and want to work to achieve social revolution. We recognise that the class struggle is world-wide, and are affiliated to the International Workers' Association (IWA), whose Principles we share.



environmentalrights

SF